

# Leo Strauss

## Introduction to Political Philosophy (1965)

### Sessions 10-16 (Aristotle)

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## Session 10: no date

**Leo Strauss:** [In progress]—prescientific or prephilosophic thought, whereas in modern times, these concepts are inherited and they are ready for use. Used, therefore, and which is more important, transformed, but no longer originally required, which implies that if we wish to understand the modern concepts which came into being through the transformation of those concepts inherited from classical antiquity,<sup>1</sup> we have to return first to the classical basis if we wish to understand the modern concepts. Classical political philosophy, we can also say, is related to political life directly, not through a nonpolitical medium [such] as the tradition of political philosophy or a nonpolitical political science, as in our age. And the simple sign of that is that in classical political philosophy there are no technical terms to speak of. The terms are terms used in ordinary political life—in the marketplace, in senates, in cabinets—but not peculiarly scientific or academic terms, whereas the opposite is true in modern times and [was] already to some extent in the Middle Ages. The classical political philosophers tried to understand political life as the citizen and the statesman understand it, with this difference: that they tried to look further ahead or afield than the practical men do, but not in a different perspective. They are not standing as it were outside and observing political life, the big fishes swallowing the small ones, but in the perspective in which they are seen in political life.

One can also say that the method of classical political philosophy is presented by political life itself. In all political life we find conflicts between individuals and groups, the conflicting parties asserting opposed claims, ordinarily in the name of justice. Now both sides use arguments in support of their claims. Not all these arguments are solid, but they supply nevertheless the starting point for any proper understanding of what supports the claim of the opposed parties. The method is therefore to follow up and consider critically the arguments presented on both sides and on this basis reach an impartial decision. Because this is the primary form in which the political philosopher appears: as the arbiter, the impartial arbiter, between the groups opposing opposed claims, an arbiter who will give each side its due. So the political philosopher is then primarily the umpire par excellence, the underlying-thought being: he is a good citizen, and the duty of the good citizen is to make civil strife cease and to create by persuasion agreement among the citizens. He must not be a partisan.

Now in order to understand more fully the phenomenon of the political philosopher in its original form, we have to consider the fact that, as the umpire, the political philosopher is a citizen like every other citizen: he belongs to this or that city, as a rule, by birth: son of a citizen father and citizen mother. As such, he cannot fulfill his function in a city other than his own. His work is not transferable from his city to any other city. Yet one observes soon that<sup>2</sup> while this work as such seems to be nontransferable, there are necessarily in political life some skills which are [transferable]. For example, a general may be lent to an allied city, in ancient times as well as in ours. Or someone may be

banished from his city, like Themistocles was from Athens, and he may prove to be an excellent advisor to the enemy of Athens, the king of Persia. Or later on, Alcibiades, who also had to flee from Athens and yet was the best advisor whom the Spartans could find: since he knew the weaknesses of Athens better than anyone else, he could become an excellent traitor to his fatherland.<sup>i</sup>

So there are skills which are transferable, and to the extent to which they are transferable, they are also teachable, in principle, like any other art. The teaching of the political arts developed first as that of one important part of the political art, which is the art of speaking. All political action, if it is reasonable, is based on deliberation. The deliberation takes place by means of speech. In a democracy surely that means of public speech. And the art of public speech proved to be susceptible of being taught by teachers of that art, of the art of rhetoric. And prior to classical political philosophy, we can say, political science as a transferable thing had emerged as the art of rhetoric. And at the end of his *Ethics*, Aristotle takes issue with those people who say the political art is simply the art of rhetoric, a view which according to Aristotle is very erroneous.<sup>ii</sup> But at any rate, this was a fact, and this is surely not an accident, that the part of the political skill which was originally raised to the level of a teachable art was the art of rhetoric.

Now this is insufficient, from the classical point of view. Deliberation deals in the first place with measures, as we would say—say, war and peace, and the other things—but also with things of a more permanent character: war or peace *now*, the question of the moment. And these permanent things are the laws; therefore the more important, the broader, object of deliberation is legislation. And that political science in the original sense of the term, where it is identical with the political skill, the skill of the statesman, was raised to the level of a transferable teaching when it could become the teaching of the art of legislation, the highest political art—as Aristotle says, the architectonic art, related to all other arts as that of the architect to that of the carpenter and other artisans connected with building houses.<sup>iii</sup> As the net result, the political philosopher then comes to sight not simply as a legislator, but as a teacher of legislators. Every legislator has to do with the particular situation of this city, located here and there with these and these enemies, these and these resources, and so on, and he tries to do the best for that city. But he cannot do this without having implicitly notions of what is simply good for the city as such, notions which he adapts to this particular city, not necessarily being aware of the universal principles of preference implied in what he is doing here and now. The teacher of legislators, i.e., the teacher of men who are supposed to give laws or to elaborate codes

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<sup>i</sup> Themistocles, an Athenian general and statesman, was the great hero of the Persian War who later fell out of favor and was exiled from Athens. He gained the confidence of the Persian king, who assigned to him several cities in Asia Minor; see Thucydides I.135-138. Alcibiades was a prominent Athenian political figure who fled the city in 415 under suspicion of various religious offenses and generally of harboring subversive ambitions. He took refuge among the Spartans, whom he persuaded to establish a permanent fort at Decelea in Attica, to the detriment of the Athenian war effort. He later lost credit with the Spartans and eventually returned to Athens. His exploits are described in Thucydides, Bks. V-VIII.

<sup>ii</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* X.1181a14-15.

<sup>iii</sup> *NE* I.1-2.

for the most different cities, cannot possibly be bound by the requirements of this or that situation of this or that city. He must think primarily in universal terms. Now these are then the two figures, we can say, in which the political philosopher primarily appeared in Greece: the umpire par excellence, and the teacher of legislators. There is a connection between these two things. The umpire has to do with the settlement of controversies. Now *the* fundamental political controversy concerns, as we may provisionally say, the form of government: should it be a democracy, oligarchy, and so on. This is the fundamental controversy. And the settlement of this controversy is prior, [it] precedes legislation proper, for all laws are to be made with a view to the form of government. Inheritance, publicity of speech, whatever you have, depends on the form of government. Therefore, by being the teacher of legislators, the political philosopher is the umpire par excellence.

Now these two considerations of which I reminded you—the distinction between *physis* and *nomos*, and what is implied in Hegel's remark about the difference of study in ancient and modern times—<sup>iv</sup> these two general considerations indicate the minimum conditions with which one must comply in order to have an access to classical political philosophy. But this is only a minimum condition. In order to understand classical political philosophy, or in order to study it properly, we have to wonder where we should begin our study of classical political philosophy. My answer would be: with Aristotle's *Politics*. Not with Plato, for the writings of Plato, the *Republic* especially but the others too, are dialogues [and] not, as Aristotle's *Politics* is, a treatise. In the dialogues Plato never speaks. One could say: Well, while Plato never speaks, Socrates speaks, and Socrates is Plato's mouthpiece. Yet this is not so simple, as is sufficiently indicated by the fact that Socrates was most famous for his irony. Never to speak oneself and to have a spokesman who is famous for his irony: this is almost the same as if one were never to speak. More specifically, irony, the word, has undergone many changes in the course of the centuries, but in the primary meaning, or secondary meaning which for us is most important, it means to speak with a view to somebody: *ad hominem*, as the Latins say. So all remarks which, say, Socrates makes, or any other Platonic spokesman, are made with a view to the interlocutors: their situation, permanent or momentary, their character, their abilities, their social position. And in order to find out what Socrates would say about the same subject absolutely, not with a view to this or that kind of man, one would have to translate the explicit statement into one which would be meant to be absolutely true. One would have to transform the relative statements into absolute statements, and this is not so easy to do, whereas in Aristotle, we hear Aristotle himself talking to us all the time. This difference between Aristotle and Plato is also the reason why it is not wise to begin one's study of classical political thought with the dramatic poets, who of course speak as little by themselves as Plato does, and it would be a great mistake to believe that the choruses present directly the view, say, of Sophocles. Even in the case of the historian Thucydides, the most important, broad statements are not made by Thucydides himself but by his characters in his speeches. And then again the question arises: What did Thucydides think of the wisdom and understanding of the particular speaker?

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<sup>iv</sup> See session 9.

So it is most prudent to begin the study of classical political thought with Aristotle. As for the so-called pre-Socratic philosophers, we have only fragments of them, and to interpret fragments, to understand them properly, is infinitely more difficult than to understand complete books.

Now, as for how to study Aristotle's *Politics* in a very external way, meaning which translation to use, I would think that the best translation available is that by Ernest Barker, in the Oxford edition, which is also available, I believe, in paperback.<sup>v</sup> The translation is useful especially for this reason, that Barker gives, in brackets, explanation of the very terse statements which Aristotle makes and which to begin with would be wholly unintelligible. It is true that in this respect Aristotle becomes much more loquacious or talkative than he in fact is, and the peculiar charm that is characteristic of Aristotle is lost in that way. But you cannot have it both ways, and to begin with, one must be grateful for every help one can get. Barker has also written in this book a very useful introduction, in which he takes up an issue which is quite confusing and quite useless, namely, the question of the development, the so-called development of Aristotle's thought from his early time, when he was sitting at Plato's feet, until his old age, something which some philologists believed they could find out about, and Barker very wisely reaches the conclusion that it is impossible to say anything about that. But since you may be confronted with this issue of the development of Aristotle, it is quite good to read Barker's sober argument.

Let us then turn without any further ado to the beginning of Aristotle's *Politics*. And we will read at the beginning. Does every one of you have the edition? Well, I will read.

Observation shows us, first, that every polis (or state) is a species of association, and, secondly, that all associations are instituted for the purpose of attaining some good—for all men do all their acts with a view to achieving something which is, in their view, a good. We may therefore hold<sup>vi</sup> that all associations aim at some good; and we may also hold that the particular association which is the most sovereign of all, the most authoritative of all,<sup>vii</sup> and includes all the others, will pursue this aim to the highest degree, and will thus be directed to the most sovereign, the most authoritative, of all goods. This most authoritative and inclusive association is the polis, as it is called, or the political association.<sup>viii</sup>

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<sup>v</sup> *The Politics of Aristotle*, ed. and trans. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962). Barker and Strauss use different translations of the key terms *polis*, *politeia*, and *arête*. Barker renders these words state, constitution, and goodness respectively, whereas Strauss translates them city, regime, and virtue. Strauss and his students substitute Strauss's translations of these key terms for Barker's in many, but not all, of the citations of Barker presented hereinafter. Substitutions of Strauss's translations of these words are not indicated in subsequent footnotes due to the frequency of their occurrence.

<sup>vi</sup> Barker's interpolation "[on the basis of what we actually observe]" is omitted.

<sup>vii</sup> The words "the most authoritative of all" are not in Barker.

<sup>viii</sup> *Politics* I.1252a1-7.

Now Aristotle goes, as you see, immediately into the midst of things. The *Politics* naturally deals with the polis. Now the first question which arises, to which we have alluded before, is how to translate polis. Barker follows the usual procedure by saying “the polis, paren: or the state.” But we have been reminded by Collingwood in some passages which I read to you that this is a grave question, whether one can translate it in this manner. Some people say today, in order to avoid the difficulty, “the city-state”—which doesn’t make it better, because then we imply of course that we know what “the state” is and think there is a kind of state called the city-state—and believe<sup>3</sup> [they] solve the question in this way.

Now let us look at a later political thinker and his definition of what Aristotle means, roughly, by the polis, and that is Thomas Hobbes. Let us see how he defines the polis. “This done”—I will not read what that is—“the multitude so united in one person, is called a commonwealth; in Latin, *civitas*.”<sup>ix</sup> But “*civitas*” was the traditional translation into Latin of the Greek “polis.” So “commonwealth” would be a tolerably good translation of polis. Let us also see another translation of the term by Hobbes, which is somewhat closer to our concern, in the *Elements of Law*, part 1, chapter 19: “This union so made is that which men call nowadays”—he doesn’t say “a state”—“a body politic, or civil society, and the Greeks call it *polis*, that is to say, a city.”<sup>x</sup>

So you see, even in the seventeenth century, the word “state” was not yet necessary, was not the most natural<sup>4</sup> [term] for a man like Hobbes to use.<sup>5</sup> Hobbes translates “*polis*” by “city,” which is the best translation of the word, and he gives the equivalent in English of “a body politic or civil society.” Now we shall then not hesitate to translate “*polis*” by “city,” but we must be clear that this is only replacing one riddle by another: the riddle being the Greek word “*polis*,” and then we replace it by the riddle in English, called the “city.” For when we speak of city, we surely do not mean the polis. Think of the city of London, or the City *in* London, which has an entirely different connotation.

We have therefore to raise the question: What is the equivalent of “*polis*” in our world, in our language? Surely not “the state,” for when we speak of the state, we imply a distinction between the state and society, and the very beginning of the *Politics* which I read to you shows that this is excluded. If we speak of state and society, we do not say the state is the all-inclusive society and society is only a partial society. The simple and best equivalent in English to what the Greeks meant by the polis is the *country*. When you speak of the country, say, “the country is in danger,” you also don’t make a distinction between state and society: you mean a single whole. The polis consists of the town and countryside, and so does the country, which consists of towns, cities, and countryside.<sup>6</sup> “Country,” we may say, is the equivalent of “*polis*” on the level of our everyday citizen’s understanding. But this is not sufficient, because we are not simply thinking on that everyday level. I wonder whether the term “the country” is ever used in a scientific treatise within political science or sociology, although it will occur frequently in political speeches. This shows you the cleavage between prescientific understanding and scientific understanding which is so characteristic of our age.

<sup>ix</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 17.

<sup>x</sup> Hobbes, *Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, pt. 1, chap. 19, sec. 8.

Now the passage which I read to you from the very beginning of the *Politics* shows that the polis is concerned with the most comprehensive good, whereas the other associations, the associations subordinate to the city, are concerned with subordinate, partial goods. Now the term which Aristotle uses for this comprehensive good is in Greek “*eudaimonia*,” ordinarily translated into English by “happiness.” Let us not go into this great question of how to translate “*eudaimonia*,” let us simply use the word “happiness” for the time being: the complete human good. Now the polis is concerned with the complete human good. By happiness Aristotle understands above all virtuous activity, and of course this means that you dispose of the conditions of virtuous activity. So if you are very sick, for example, and for this reason not able to act virtuously in every respect, this shows indirectly that health is a part of happiness. But<sup>7</sup> of course different people have different views of happiness, and even the same people at different times of their lives. So one can assume (as men were more inclined to assume in modern times than in ancient times) that happiness is strictly subjective, and then of course it becomes impossible to define the end of the state in terms of happiness. Political society cannot be defined, then, as a society devoted to happiness. This is perhaps the best starting point for understanding the peculiar obstacle which we have in understanding “polis.” Yet when we look around and admit that there is an innumerable variety of notions of what happiness is, we can nevertheless hold that there is something in common despite this enormous variety, and that is certain *conditions* of happiness. Whatever you may understand by happiness, you need to be alive to pursue your happiness. Furthermore, you must have the possibility of circulation: you must be free; if you are chained or jailed, you are not likely to pursue your happiness, however you may understand that happiness. And thirdly, you must have the possibility of pursuing happiness as you understand happiness. I refer to a formula known to you all from the Declaration of Independence: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. They are understood here in the Declaration as man’s fundamental, natural rights, but one can also look at them from the other point of view, in no way contradicting, that they are the conditions for happiness, however happiness may be understood.

Now here we have then this strange situation. Men are striving for happiness. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are only in the service of their enjoyment of happiness. Happiness is the end; life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are means, and therefore lower. But on the other hand, whereas happiness is wholly subjective—everyone understands something different by happiness—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are objective. Whatever you understand by happiness, you need life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Now men pursue happiness as each one understands happiness, and this takes place partly in cooperation with others, and partly in competition with others. This cooperative, competitive activity, where each aims at his happiness, produces a kind of web, we can say; and this web is society, in contradistinction to the state. The state only is concerned with the conditions as specified before.

Now in this understanding of the relation of state and society, there is a peculiar ambiguity. In one respect, the state is higher: it aims at something which all need,



something of objective validity. But these are all only means, and therefore lower. The highest is no longer objective. In order to overcome this difficulty—this dualism where the order of rank between the two elements, state and society, is ambiguous—one must turn to something broader, of which state and society as hitherto understood are parts. And modern man succeeded in discovering such a thing, or in inventing it. And this matrix, of which state and society and some other things are parts, is exactly what is ordinarily understood by culture. When you speak of the culture of a tribe or a nation, or a city, it means this broader thing, this broader association of which state and society are parts. I would say that the concept of culture, now so widely used, is the equivalent of “*polis*,” on the level of theory, on the level of academic thought as distinguished from citizen-thought, on which level the equivalent of “*polis*” is the country.

We would say, for example, that tragedy, dramatic poetry, belongs to culture—belongs to culture, but not to the state. Yet according to the classics, tragedy has a certain moral function—say, the purification of certain passions—and the moral function is inseparable from the political function, therefore tragedy belongs to the polis, as it in fact did in Athens. Surely tragedy is not exhausted by that moral-political function, but to the extent to which it transcends it, it belongs to the sphere of wisdom—of wisdom which is no longer a part of the polis. So in other words, what we would call culture is from the classical point of view a composite consisting of the polis on the one hand, and of wisdom on the other. And we learn from this, incidentally, that our concept of culture presupposes a much closer connection between polis and wisdom than the classics’ did, that so to speak every polis has its peculiar wisdom, a thought which the classics implicitly rejected. Wisdom proper is universal, *de jure*—whether *de facto* is another question.

Now by making this reflection (which could be enlarged) on the modern equivalents of “*polis*,” we do justice to the truth of historicism, namely, to the fact that radical changes have in fact occurred, so that the understanding of the most important and fundamental terms has changed. Now is there any point which you think needs some further clarification, or where you feel it could now be given? The last point [which I made] is perhaps most difficult to understand,<sup>8</sup> that polis and wisdom are not only distinguishable but have a fundamentally different character insofar as the polis is always this or that polis, particular society, whereas wisdom is universal—*de jure*, as I said, if not necessarily *de facto*—whereas our modern concept of culture implies an assimilation of these two things. Yes?

**Student:** But doesn’t the fact that the Greeks regarded tragedy as having a moral function which in turn was inseparable from a political function imply that they regarded wisdom, at least in the form of poetry, as being more subordinate to political—

**LS:** Ya, well, the word “wisdom” has many meanings. There is a practical wisdom which essentially belongs to practical, political life. I meant now “wisdom” in a severer and stricter sense, where it is theoretical wisdom, say, the understanding of man—in tragedy, for example.

**Student:** Well, the fact that tragedy and the tragic view has some theoretical wisdom in it, and yet you say that the moral function of tragedy in Greece was inseparable from the political function . . . .

**LS:** The moral function belongs together with the political function. It is the purpose of the city to make the citizens good and doers of noble deeds, as Aristotle says.<sup>x1</sup> That is inseparable. And Aristotle calls the whole teaching, which includes his *Ethics*, a kind of political investigation. That is not the point—I mean, the difficulty doesn’t lie there. Well, let me start from another phenomenon which I have to touch upon later, without which one cannot understand this whole of classical [thought]. Our present-day thought, and already since some centuries, is based on a fundamentally different understanding of the relation between theoretical wisdom and ordinary human life than the classics had, and especially Aristotle had. And the change was effected by that great movement popularly called the Enlightenment, but which is much more than the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, which comprises already the seventeenth century.<sup>9</sup> According to the Enlightenment, wisdom can be spread, can be diffused among the whole population, and therefore the difference between the theoretically wise and the theoretically non-wise ceases to be very important. Does this thought make sense to you? The very notion of an enlightenment of this kind is absent from classical thought, and therefore there is no simple harmony between philosophy and the polis, between wisdom and the polis. Wisdom<sup>10</sup> is, according to its own intention, universal; the polis is necessarily particular. You see, what we have done in modern times is also shown by the following fact. The word “culture,” which means only cultivation in itself—or say, of the soil; but of course men then speak also of the cultivation of the mind—was also used in former times in the singular: *cultura mentis*. But then in the nineteenth century people began to use the term “culture” in the plural: “cultures.” That is to say, cultures were now understood to be particular in the same way, or almost the same way in which political societies are particular, you see? Whereas according to the older notion there is only one culture of the mind or of the heart. This assimilation of the culture of the mind to political life is a modern phenomenon<sup>11</sup> underlying our present use of the term “culture.” Today in the ordinary meaning, even in anthropology, culture has nothing whatever to do with any cultivation of the mind. When you speak of the culture of juvenile delinquents of a certain district, you do not think seriously of any cultivation of the mind. That is a still further step. But originally, in the nineteenth century, “culture,” even if used in the plural, meant high culture. Then it was applied to every “quote culture” of every tribe, and then finally of course also to every subdivision of any society, however small and deplorable.

Now let us first follow Aristotle’s argument. Aristotle goes on to prove that the polis is the highest and the most comprehensive association, and he tries to prove that by considering the most important among the other associations. These are the family or the household, and the village.<sup>12</sup> At this point we take up his discussion.

Man, when perfected, is the best of animals; but if he be isolated from law and justice he is the worst of all. Injustice is all the graver when it is armed injustice;

<sup>x1</sup> Possibly a reference to *Politics* III.1281a2-3.

and man is furnished by nature with arms<sup>xii</sup> which are intended to serve the purposes of prudence and virtue, but which may be used in preference for opposite ends. That is why, if man<sup>xiii</sup> be without virtue, he is the most unholy and savage being, and worse than all others in the indulgence of lust and gluttony. Justice<sup>xiv</sup> belongs to the polis; for justice, which is the determination of what is just, is an ordering of the political association.<sup>xv</sup>

Now what has he in mind here? Let us first take another consideration. The polis comes into being out of natural associations, such as the household: it comes into being out of natural associations, therefore it is itself natural. In a sense, it is even more natural than the preceding associations. That is here Aristotle . . . difficulty . . . the translation . . . In a sense, the city according to Aristotle is even more natural than the household and other preceding associations. Why? Because all the other associations are in a way imperfect. They do not fulfill all of man's natural needs. Being imperfect, they point to the city as its perfection. The end of a natural thing is most emphatically the nature of the thing. A simple example: [if] we want to know the nature of a horse, we look at a grown-up horse in a good state of health, etc., meaning that a colt or a sick horse is a defective horse. The nature of a thing is the thing in its perfection. The point with which Aristotle is here concerned is not only that the polis is natural, but above all that it is natural as *city*, namely, as essentially different from the household. Some other thinkers to whom Aristotle alludes, the most important of whom is Plato, had asserted there is only a quantitative difference between the household and the city.<sup>xvi</sup> Aristotle says: No, there is a qualitative, an essential difference, and that is to say, in other words, the polis is natural precisely in its character as polis and not merely as an overgrown household. The key implication of that is that if the polis is by nature—the thesis with which in a way the whole book begins—<sup>13</sup> [then] the polis is not by convention. It is not by contract, to use the term used later on very frequently.

<sup>14</sup>This being the case, that the polis is by nature, it follows that man is *by nature* the political animal. By nature. And why? Because what is the peculiarity of man, the thing characteristic of man, the specific difference of man? The fact that man possesses *logos*, speech or reason. And speech or reason is the reason why man is political. Aristotle says man is more political, more social, than all other social animals. *Logos*, speech or reason, socializes much more than anything else could, for without *logos* there would be only a sensual awareness, in particular, awareness of pleasure and pain. And this does not bind men together to the same degree as other kinds of awareness. Through *logos* we have awareness also of just and unjust. We can go a step further and say that the perfect union of two human individuals, of two individuals in general, is possible only in and through thought: if they think identically the same. Such an identity regarding feelings can never be known, even if they use the same words. If you take the simplest case: they follow the

<sup>xii</sup> Strauss omits from his reading Barker's interpolation "[such as, for instance, language]."

<sup>xiii</sup> In the place of "man" Barker has "he."

<sup>xiv</sup> The interpolation "[which is his salvation]" is omitted.

<sup>xv</sup> *Politics* I.1253a31-39.

<sup>xvi</sup> *Politics* I.1252a7 ff.

same demonstration of the same theory, there can be no doubt that their thoughts are fully united. They think exactly the same.

The polis is natural to man also in another sense. As Aristotle explains [more fully] later on in Book 7,<sup>15</sup> the city is what we would call a fairly small society: a society in which everyone knows not everybody else (that would be a village), but in which everyone can know an acquaintance of everybody else, so that he can find out about that man, for example, if he is running for office, by direct knowledge. Also, the polis as Aristotle understands it is a society large enough to fulfill all man's essential natural needs, and small enough so that it is commensurate with the limitations of man's natural powers of knowing and of caring. We can know—in a way, we all know President Johnson and Vice President Humphrey, but in which way? From the TV. That is not knowledge in the sense in which you know someone with whom you have grown up, or who has grown up with your parents, and so on. In other words, one can say that a polis is a society small enough so that it can be addressed [by a speaker] without the help of any artificial things.<sup>16</sup> They can be assembled in body and addressed by<sup>17</sup> [him].

In the passage which I read to you, Aristotle makes it clear that man, to the extent to which he is not political, to which he is prepolitical or apolitical, [and] not by accident but incapable of living with others, is very bad. What Aristotle speaks<sup>18</sup> about [here] reminds of what Hobbes said of the state of nature, and what Hobbes expresses by saying that man is by nature—i.e., without social discipline, without being subject to laws—<sup>19</sup>asocial. But what is the precise difference between Hobbes and Aristotle? That is of some importance. Now why is man such a nasty being, according to Hobbes? What makes him so nasty? What Hobbes calls pride: concern with being superior to others and with being recognized as superior by others. This is the reason why Hobbes regards him as asocial. Now Aristotle would reply: But what you say proves men's asociality, proves men's *sociality*: a being who is radically dependent on the opinions of others is a radically social being. In other words, Hobbes has not thought deeply enough: he mistakes antisociality for asociality. But these antisocial people you see and hear a lot these days, and they are of course in a very radical sense social: they are so much concerned with being important, as they call it, and since they cannot become important by legal ways, they try to get it by illegal ways. But "important" means of course being looked up to by others, a radical sociality. Hobbes mistakes sociality for benevolence. But malevolence also is social, also antisocial. And a radically asocial being would not be in this sense malevolent.

Now the Aristotelian doctrine that man is by nature social became the traditional doctrine throughout the ages until it was attacked, especially by Hobbes, in the seventeenth century. And in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was a running controversy between those who said that man is by nature social and those who denied it. The doctrines asserting men's natural sociality were at that time called the socialist doctrines, and the others the antisocialists. You see how much the meaning of these terms has changed. By the way, what is true of socialism applies of course, in a way, still more to individualism. For example, the Stoics are famous for their individualism, but in this

sense they are of course socialists because they too teach the natural sociality of man. This only in passing.

Now when Aristotle says that the polis is by nature, he means more than [that] the polis is not conventional. He excludes also the view that another kind of political association is by nature, at least to the same degree as the polis, and that is the *ethnos*, in Greek. We can translate it by “tribe” or “nation”: a nonurban association of nomads, or tillers of the soil, or whatever have you. One can<sup>20</sup> explain the exclusion of the *ethnos* in the following way. Man is born for civilization. “Civilization” is derivative from *civis* (citizen) and *civitas*; and<sup>21</sup> there is also a Greek equivalent for that, pointing to *polis*. Man is born for civilization, and in a tribal life he cannot find that.

The proposition that the polis is natural means furthermore that the city is not sacred. When Homer and other poets speak of the city, say, of Troy, they call it the “sacred city.” Aristotle calls it natural. This is also an important consideration. It is confirmed by the fact that in Aristotle’s discussion of the virtues in the *Ethics*, piety does not occur. Aristotle emphasizes in the *Politics* that the concern with divine things is a part of the concerns of the city—temples, sacrifices, and so on. But he indicates the ambiguous position of this concern by the following remark. In enumerating what the concerns of the city are—one, two, three, four, five, and so on—he says, at the fifth and at the first place, the concern with the divine things. In other words, from one point of view, this is of course the most important, the first place. But from another point of view it is not. This is a hint which needs thinking through. The concern with the divine things is a part of the concerns of the city but also it transcends the city, namely, in the form of philosophy, which from Aristotle’s point of view is of course the highest form of the concern with the divine things.

This view is, by the way, also confirmed by the *Republic*. The<sup>22</sup> venerable old man Cephalus, the father, at the beginning, goes out to sacrifice, whereas Socrates discusses the best political order with the younger men. One could find other examples. Surely this peculiar secularism must not be identified with the modern secularism, for the simple reason<sup>23</sup> [that] Aristotle was not a man of the Enlightenment. But the situation is clearly enough indicated at the beginning of Plato’s dialogue *Timaeus*, where a man, an interlocutor,<sup>24</sup> has been reminded by Plato’s *Republic* of the old Egyptian order, in which the place occupied in Plato’s *Republic* by the philosophers is occupied by priests, and he is not aware of the difference, as Socrates or Plato were. It is definitely not a priestly order, the polis, although it necessarily includes priests.

Now the bulk of the First Book of the *Politics* is devoted to the household as the most important part of the city, or to the management of the household. Management of the household is in Greek *oikonomia*, from which the English word “economics” is derived. In a way, Aristotle takes up the economic questions, but all within the context of the management of the household. The question of finance and any public economy is not taken up in any way.

[change of tape]

LS: —except that he defended slavery. Now that is true, he defended slavery. I shall speak of that immediately. But it is not sufficient to know only this fact, because then one doesn't know why he defended it and what are the conscious limitations of his defense. Aristotle starts from the fact that slavery is a controversial thing. Some people say [that] to rule as a master over slaves is against nature, for it is merely by *nomos* that one man is a slave and the other a freeman and by nature there is no difference. And since it is not based on nature, it is unjust: it is merely an act of violence. Nature is violated by that institution.

Aristotle states the problem in these very simple terms: Is slavery natural or conventional? If it is only conventional, it is, as matters stand, unjust. In order to answer this question, he must of course first define what is a slave. The answer is: a possession, a piece of property, which is animate—not like a pot or a hammer, but more specifically, an animate tool, not for the purpose of production of things, but for the purpose of life or use, or action. Life is action, not production. Action or use, not production. Production is only in the service of life, but not life itself. In other words, a slave is not understood here as a tool of producing things in mines underground or in factory-like undertakings, but as a household slave, as a helper for man in his life.<sup>25</sup> Aristotle asserts that slavery properly understood is natural. In order to show that, he starts from the fact that the whole of nature has a hierarchic character. Everywhere we find higher and lower: something which by nature rules, and something which by nature is ruled. The example nearest home is the difference between the mind—the soul—and the body. Desire, passions: they belong to the soul in contradistinction to the mind. And the mind is by nature the ruler of the desires and the passions, and the soul in its turn is the ruler of the body. Also the difference between the male and female, which is not limited to the human race, is<sup>26a</sup> a sign of the hierarchic character of the whole, the male being the ruling part. The soul rules the body, Aristotle says, like a master does, i.e., as if the body were a slave, namely, by sheer command, not by persuasion. We cannot talk to our body as we can talk to our anger, for example, and therefore the mind, the soul, rules the passions politically by persuasion.

Now the slave participates in speech sufficiently as to be able to listen to speech, but not to have *logos* within himself. This is Aristotle's definition. And such a man is therefore justly enslaved and no violence is done to him—on the contrary, for him it is useful to be a slave, just as it is useful to his master to have him as a slave. Now what then is a natural slave? A man who can understand in the way in which no animal can understand, no brute animal can understand, and yet not sufficiently that he can guide his own life. He needs someone else to guide him. Take an example of someone who can understand the command: Bring five logs into the house—one, two, three, four, five. He can do that, no dog could do that. But on the other hand, he couldn't take care of himself because he might be wholly incapable of controlling his desire for alcoholic beverages and for other things. The greatest presentation of what Aristotle understands by a natural slave, now from the less amiable side, is the presentation of Caliban in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, where, if you remember<sup>27</sup> the situation, the thought that Caliban deserves to be controlled by Prospero, and at Prospero's command to be tricked by Ariel and so on, is not a

shocking suggestion. The question is: How great can the political relevance of this fact be? Aristotle thought it is very great. So slavery is therefore natural if applied to people who are by nature slaves. If it is applied to people who are not by nature slaves, it is plainly injustice, so, for example, to enslave people merely because they have been taken as prisoners in war, this is unjust.

Now we will see later on that this is not the last word of Aristotle on the subject. Later on, in Books 7 to 8, where he describes the best commonwealth as he sees it, slavery is taken for granted, and he proposes there that the slaves be given the prospect of emancipation. Now this would be clearly impossible in the case of natural slaves, because they are by definition people who cannot be emancipated because they cannot take care of themselves. Therefore, Aristotle must there assume that you will have also slaves who are slaves only by convention, i.e., who are unjustly slaves. How this can be reconciled with what we read in Book 1, we must postpone.

Now Aristotle continues the discussion as follows. “It is clear from this explanation of what the slave is that the rule of a master and political rule are not the same”—as Plato among others seems to have considered it. “For the one, political rule, is rule over free men, the other is over slaves. And the rule within the household is monarchical, for every household is ruled by one man; while political rule is the rule over free and equals. The ruler is not called ruler with a view to the knowledge which he possesses”—as when we say a man is a physician with a view to the fact that he possesses the ability, skill, and knowledge of the physician—“but because he is such a one”—meaning, because he is a master. “And the same applies also to freemen and slaves”—they are not freemen or slaves because of peculiar knowledge which they possess.<sup>xvii</sup>

Aristotle goes on to say that this does not mean that there is not a certain kind of knowledge which slaves, for example, must have. There was a man in Syracuse, he tells, who had a school for slaves, where they learned the kinds of things they had to do in the household, and it is also possible to say there is a kind of knowledge which the master needs in order to give commands to the slaves. But Aristotle says this is not something grand, this kind of knowledge, and he who can afford it will have a bailiff who takes care of this kind of knowledge. And the masters themselves will lead a political life or will seek for wisdom. Here you have the simple alternative: the truly human life is either political life or the life of quest for wisdom: “philosophy” in Greek, an alternative to which we shall have to come back more than once.

Now the next great theme, also belonging to economics, is that part which has to do not with human beings, in particular slaves, but with other kinds of property. And here the greatest question is the relation of moneymaking to management of the household. Aristotle asserts that they are two entirely different things. The<sup>28</sup> distinction between moneymaking and management of the household is based on a distinction between the natural forms of property, of acquisition or possession, and those which are not natural. The natural ones are essentially limited by what a man and his family can reasonably use. The art of acquiring money is essentially unlimited, and therefore there is something

<sup>xvii</sup> *Politics* I.1255b16-22. Apparently Strauss’s translation.

wrong with it, that a finite being should seek for infinite money. And among the natural forms of acquisition, the most important is agriculture. Agriculture has a much higher status, according to Aristotle and according to Plato, than commerce, industry—and especially, which is the lowest, the lending of interest, which from Aristotle’s point of view is altogether unjust or immoral.

Now we do not have to go into the details of Aristotle’s economic teaching, his teaching regarding the natural and the unnatural forms of acquisition. [Some of these] points<sup>29</sup> have a direct importance, and I will mention only one point. The distinction which Marx makes with particular clarity between use-value and exchange-value is literally taken from Aristotle. Marx makes of course a very different use for it, and naturally, because for Marx the fundamental phenomenon in the sphere of economics is production, which is not so in Aristotle. For Aristotle, the fundamental thing is the purpose of use—or if you look at the other side, the gifts of nature rather than that which exists by means of human production. Into this I cannot go. The main point which is so striking here as elsewhere is the orientation by what is natural and not natural. Without it one cannot understand anything of Aristotle’s teachings at any point. There is a natural way of earning a livelihood and an unnatural [one], and the criterion is, for example, whether it is determined, whether it has limits, or whether it is unlimited. What is natural is necessarily limited, has a specific character. Nature means primarily the nature of a particular kind of things, whether they are men or dogs or horses—i.e., things distinguished from others, separate from the others, having a limit with a view to others. The unlimited is, from this point of view, not natural. After having gone through the economic question, of which the issue of slavery is a primary and in a way the most important part, Aristotle turns in the Second Book to a new subject.

We have learned in our way that the polis is natural, its parts are natural, that there is a natural slavery, there is a natural way of acquiring property. And now we turn to the polis, but in which sense? Book 2 begins as follows.

Since we have the intention to contemplate regarding the political association, which is the best of all, for those who can live to the highest degree as they would wish, we must consider also the other forms of government, which some of the cities use, those cities which are reputed to be well-administered, and if there should be any others, which have been said (pronounced) by some people, and which have the reputation of being good, so that we will see what is correct and useful in them and what is not.<sup>xviii</sup>

And so on. Now Aristotle turns then here to the question of the best form of government (I will leave it at this provisional translation of the Greek word “*politeia*”). But before he turns to this question, he looks at what we can learn from what others present us: <sup>30</sup>[first], cities which are reputed to be admirable; second, blueprints of cities which are reputed to be admirable. You see, Aristotle proceeds in a strictly commonsensical way. He finds his bearings by reputation, assuming that reputation is never entirely unfounded, surely not in reasonably free societies, and therefore it is of some help. But the strange thing is—for us

<sup>xviii</sup> *Politics* II.1260b27-33. Apparently Strauss’s translation.



it is strange—that he treats the commonwealth, or the political orders which exist in fact, say, in Sparta, in the same way in which he treats, say, Plato’s *Republic*. In other words, whether this is an actual or a blueprinted order does not make any difference for Aristotle. This is quite remarkable. The procedure is, incidentally, not historical; he begins the discussion of these various regimes with Plato’s proposals in the *Republic* and the *Laws*, then takes up the proposals by some earlier thinkers, and only then he turns to the actual orders which have a good reputation, such as Sparta. Characteristically, not Athens: Athens is, among the people whom Aristotle addresses, not reputed to be a good polity, therefore it is treated with silence. We will discuss this next time.

Now among the discussions of the Second Book, the criticism of Plato is of course most important, because Aristotle does here something which he did not do in Book 1, namely, show that the household—the family, as we can also say—is necessary. He only showed that the polis is superior [to], is essentially different from, and broader and more comprehensive than, the family. But he did consider the possibility that there might be a family-less, a household-less polis, which theoretically is possible: that is exactly what Plato does in the *Republic*.<sup>xix</sup> So in the criticism of Plato’s *Republic* he shows why the household, and private property, and private family are necessary. And this is one very important point which Aristotle makes in Book 2, and the other is his discussion of the earliest political philosopher, as we can call him, Hippodamus, which you will also find there, and I think it would be helpful if you could have read it next Wednesday, that will facilitate the discussion. Now we have a minute or so left. Is there any point—yes?

**Student:**<sup>xx</sup> I’m not sure exactly why Aristotle thinks that moneymaking is unlimited . . . energy and cleverness of a man, and conventionally, by the nature of the business, by laws—

**LS:** No, but a man has, say, acquired a hundred thousand dollars. There is nothing in the nature of the case,<sup>31</sup> as far as the economic situation is concerned, against his making, if he can, a million dollars, a billion dollars, and so on and so on. But<sup>32</sup> if you do not absolutize money, if you look at the whole context, and the whole context is human use, use of the property by the property owner, then you arrive at limits. Unless you can say: Well, instead of accumulating money, he will go in for ever more luxury—he will have fifty yachts, and twenty country houses, and fifty—whatever you do; but Aristotle would say—if you look at it again concretely from the point of view of use, of good use, of virtuous use, which would not<sup>33</sup> exclude showing off, mere conspicuous consumption, as well as stinginess, of course—then you would see you cannot go beyond a certain point, that it is in itself limited. This is what he means. That you can accumulate as many houses, or pieces of land, or diamonds in the same way in which you can accumulate dollar bills, Aristotle knew (although he didn’t know of paper money), but he thinks simply that money is a very great convenience but it has the temptation in it to make us forget what it is for: that it is only a convenience. And this is a good example of what the ancients meant by mere convention. A mere convention is a convenience, but a

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<sup>xix</sup> *Republic*, Book V.

<sup>xx</sup> This speaker is erroneously identified in the transcript as Mr. Levy.

convenience which somehow pretends to be independent and therefore as it were runs away from us. <sup>34</sup>Is this not clear? Mr. Levy?

**Mr. Levy:** For Hobbes, the prepolitical state is one of war. What was the prepolitical state or way of life of men, as Aristotle saw it? And also, why was the prepolitical state insufficient . . . ?

**LS:** Well, have you ever lived in a village?

**Mr. Levy:** Yes.

**LS:** Not Greenwich Village. [Great laughter] Well, then you see there are certain things which you cannot easily get there. The chances that you would meet there someone with whom you can talk about the things which interest you are smaller than in a larger [society]. Your natural needs, the needs of your mind, cannot be so easily fulfilled. And you must not forget, of course, that any village in this country or for that matter in Europe, is a part of a larger whole and therefore not, you know? Disregarding that entirely. Yes?

**Mr. Levy:** On the second point . . . in reply one could say, in Aristotle's own terms, forgetting about the present company, the many have no regard for the mind because only force . . .

**LS:** Yes, well, as Aristotle says in the First Book of the *Politics*, if we want to find out what is natural, we must look at the healthy, and in this sense normal, members of the species and not at those who are in one way or the other corrupt or deficient. That there are people who are perfectly happy without any cultivation of their mind is undeniable, but there is something wrong with them.

**Mr. Levy:** What you're saying is—

**LS:** They are—we call them sometimes dumb, and other terms of this kind, which you doubtless know as well as I do. And we cannot take our bearings by them. We should not despise them, but we cannot take our bearings by them, and if they can be satisfied in a very dull community, that doesn't mean that we should be satisfied with that.

**Mr. Levy:** So what you're saying is that two students of political philosophy who lived in two different villages and wanted to go off and get married would make a city?

**LS:** Well, no Aristotle would say, if it is truly a village and not a part of a polis, then there will not be any students of philosophy.

**Mr. Levy:** Ah, well, where did the city come from? Who *knew* to make a city?

**LS:** How will it come about? Well,<sup>35</sup> there are two ways of understanding that. That there is a kind of need, say, common defense—I mean one of these crude needs which

everyone can understand. And then some villages settle together, and out of this a polis comes into being. And then once the polis is there, there is at least a chance for the higher things to develop. As Aristotle puts it: the polis comes into being for the sake of life, i.e., of mere life—self-defense and so on—but it *is* for the sake of living *well*.<sup>xxi</sup> Living well, not in the sense of what a glutton understands by living well, but living nobly. Now whether<sup>36</sup> this settling together of the city presupposes men of the greatest stature, surpassing the greatest philosophers, the founders, that is a long question, you know, say a man like Theseus, the mythical founder of Athens. That is a long question. According to the popular view, of course, he was a hero, *hērōs*, and not merely a philosopher. Whether Aristotle would accept that is a long question.

**Mr. Levy:** You mention civil defense. Was there generally war going on in the prepolitical world, for Aristotle?

**LS:** I beg your pardon?

**Mr. Levy:** Was generally war going on in the world prepolitically, according to Aristotle? In the *prepolitical* world—

**LS:** I suppose both. There are peaceable and non-peaceable people, and also communities. *Ça dépend*. There can be war, there will also be peace, that would not be the point. But people can defend themselves better by settling together and living together. Good. Well, then—

[end of session]

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<sup>1</sup> Deleted “that.”

<sup>2</sup> Deleted “there are.”

<sup>3</sup> Deleted “to.”

<sup>4</sup> Deleted “one.”

<sup>5</sup> Deleted “Hobbes identifies.”

<sup>6</sup> Deleted “‘This is.’”

<sup>7</sup> Deleted “happines.”

<sup>8</sup> Deleted “the last point which I made.” Moved “which I made.”

<sup>9</sup> Deleted “If.”

<sup>10</sup> Deleted “has.”

<sup>11</sup> Deleted “and”

<sup>12</sup> Deleted “And this leads.”

<sup>13</sup> Deleted “is that.”

<sup>14</sup> Deleted “Since”

<sup>15</sup> Moved “more fully.”

<sup>16</sup> Moved “by a speaker.”

<sup>17</sup> Deleted “them.”

<sup>18</sup> Moved “here.”

<sup>19</sup> Deleted “is”

<sup>20</sup> Deleted “state the exclusion”

<sup>21</sup> Deleted “therefore.”

<sup>22</sup> Deleted “old”

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<sup>xxi</sup> *Politics* I.1252b29-30.

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- <sup>23</sup> Deleted “because.”
- <sup>24</sup> Deleted “is reminded”
- <sup>25</sup> Deleted “in order to show”
- <sup>26</sup> Deleted “also”
- <sup>27</sup> Deleted “the Caliban.”
- <sup>28</sup> Deleted “distinction is based—the.”
- <sup>29</sup> Deleted “which have—some of which.” Moved “some of which.”
- <sup>30</sup> Deleted “(a)”
- <sup>31</sup> Deleted “which would speak against, the nature of the case”
- <sup>32</sup> Deleted “if you look at it from the point of view.”
- <sup>33</sup> Deleted “be which would”
- <sup>34</sup> Deleted “this is what”
- <sup>35</sup> Deleted “strictly speaking.”
- <sup>36</sup> Deleted “this presupposes.”

**Session 11: no date<sup>i</sup>**

**Leo Strauss** [In progress]—theoretical knowledge of one kind or another in modern times. Needless to say, in present-day positivistic political science, there is such a mediation through positivistically understood science, and therefore an external sign, the importance of a technical vocabulary, something wholly alien to classical political philosophy.

We turn then to the study of Aristotle's *Politics*, to the First Book, and there we see the importance rather of the first consideration, of the difference between *physis* (nature) and *nomos*, and then their direct relation to political life. How does this come [about]?

Aristotle takes issue there with Plato's assertion that the city and household differ only quantitatively, not qualitatively. In other words, he defends the dignity of the city against an attempt to reduce the city, as it were, to the same status as the household. Furthermore, Aristotle takes issue with those who assert that slavery is only conventional. Here again he defends what he regards as a basic institution of the city. Now this defensive character of the argument is connected with a fundamental problem, which we may state as follows. The whole sphere of political life, or of political understanding, is attacked on theoretical grounds, i.e., on grounds which are outside political life itself, and therefore political life and political understanding is in need of a theoretical defense. To take a present-day example: a defense of political prudence, of the particular ways of understanding peculiar to political life, this is today endangered by Marxism, by the assumed knowledge of the character of the whole historical process. You cannot simply argue prudentially, practically, against Marxism: the defense of the sphere of prudence must be theoretical because the attack is theoretical. Now the concept of *physis*, of nature, especially in contradistinction to art, is of course at home in pretheoretical, prephilosophic life. But the distinction between *physis* and *nomos*, which plays such a great role in the discussion of theory, arises in theoretical reflection and therefore this goes beyond the realm of prephilosophic understanding. Is this point clear? I will try to restate it.

Aristotle, in contradistinction to modern thought, but in particular also to Plato, assumes that the political-moral sphere has a certain independence of all studies of a physical or metaphysical nature, the reason being that the standards in the light of which we judge morally and politically are accessible directly, without any theoretical deduction. We know in a sufficient manner what moderation, magnanimity, and these other things are. Aristotle does not even make the attempt to deduce these various virtues from something more fundamental, as Plato does in the *Republic*, where he tries to show there are these and these virtues and only these virtues, with a view to the fact that the soul has these parts and order. Aristotle doesn't do that. He doesn't give a theoretical deduction, he simply takes for granted that properly-bred men know these virtues from their training, from their life, and what Aristotle does is he spells out what every gentleman would know as a matter of course. Now this sphere, the ceiling of which is the understanding of

<sup>i</sup> In the original transcript, the order of sessions 11 and 12 was reversed.

the noble and the just, of the virtues, is not in need of being deduced from higher principles or in need of being theoretically justified. But if this whole sphere of practice, of prudence, is as such attacked, then it becomes necessary to defend it. And the attack will of course be theoretical, and the defense will be theoretical. You seem to have some . . . .

**Student:** Well, can you really say, if in fact it turns out that prudence needs to be defended on theoretical grounds from these theoretical attacks, that ordinary men, who have certain opinions of virtues, *know* them? Or can you only say that they have true opinion about them, but that they really don't know?

**LS:** Yes, but that would be in the main sufficient—true opinion.

**Same student:** But it's only sufficient for practical purposes, they really don't know these the way they . . . .

**LS:** But this is a very great question, whether they cease to be more than true opinions within the context of Aristotle's *Ethics*, because this would require a theoretical deduction.<sup>1</sup> The fundamental difficulty can be stated as follows. If you try to deduce morality from something higher, then you believe you can answer the question: Why should men be decent? But from the point of view of the decent man, the question must never arise. Now Plato of course discusses this question. That is the meaning of this famous argument of Socrates against people like Thrasymachus in the *Republic* and Callicles in the *Gorgias*: that here are people, more or less clever, who refuse to acknowledge the ordinary principles of decency, and Socrates is therefore compelled to defend them. But such a defense you will seek in vain in Aristotle's *Ethics*. Surely not in the fundamental part, the first five or six Books.

Now Aristotle I said looks at the polis in the light of nature. "Nature" means here something different<sup>2</sup> [from] the totality of phenomena. "Nature" is here used as a term of distinction, namely, in contradistinction to art and *nomos*. "Nature" is understood in the way in which we found it understood in the passage of the Tenth Book of the *Odyssey*, which I read to you:<sup>ii</sup> "nature" is a term susceptible of being used in the plural. There are *natures*. Each kind of thing, say, man or dog or horse, has *its* nature. The nature of man is something radically different from the oak tree, for example. And furthermore, it is implied, and is stated by Aristotle explicitly [that] the nature of a thing is the end, *telos*. For the nature of a thing is as a thing is when its coming-into-being *has been completed*. Completed: the word in Greek is derived from the noun *telos*. Therefore the polis's naturalness is, emphatically, human association in its completed form. Nature is here understood as it shows itself in living beings most clearly: we have a beginning, seed, toward a peak, and then decay. But the end is the peak; in other words, the end does not mean the sense in which death is the end of human life.

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<sup>ii</sup> Session 9 (published in print by the University of Chicago Press, and in the future to be added to the online collection of transcripts).

Just as there is a nature of a horse, there is a nature of man. That which makes man *man*, which determines the nature of man, is *logos*, speech or reason, hence the perfection of man is above all the perfection of his speech or reason, more so than the perfection of his body, although that is also important. Man has a variety of such perfections, and this is one of the most striking differences between man and the brutes: a variety of excellences or virtues. The most important here is a distinction between practical and theoretical wisdom. There is a great difference among men in regard to reasoning, and these differences are due not only to differences in training and exercise, but also to nature. There are, as the classics say, good natures and bad natures. That doesn't mean good-natured and bad-natured people, but gifted and non-gifted people. We notice [this] even today when people speak of IQ's, which is one part of this story, but also something else which is not considered an IQ: if someone has by nature a very small power over his desires—for example, if he is what is called “oversexed”—this is also part of a bad nature from this point of view. So a well-tempered mixture of the temperaments is also important, and in a way more important than the mere IQ. Now once we understand this difference of natures, we see what the difference regarding the natural slave is. This is the extreme case, the flooring as it were: a human being who is as strong and as stupid as an ox. But still he is not quite as stupid, because otherwise he would be unable to understand “one, two, three, four,” which obviously the ox cannot understand.

Now Aristotle turns in the second half of the First Book to the investigation of property and wealth, also from the point of view of nature. True wealth is wealth according to nature.<sup>3</sup> True wealth consists of things which by their nature are capable of being used for what they are: food, for example, in contradistinction to money, as one sees clearly in times of scarcity or especially of famine, when you cannot eat the money but you can eat the food. Now let us see here a remark of Aristotle:

Of every piece of property there is a twofold use; and both uses belong essentially to the thing, but not in the same manner. For the one use is peculiar to the thing concerned, and the other is not. For example a shoe: you can use it for wearing it, and you can use it for bartering it or selling it. For both are uses of the shoe. Because even the man who gives the shoe to somebody else for money or for food uses the shoe as shoe, because the other man, the buyer, wants to have a shoe and not something else. But this bartering is not the proper use of it; for the shoe has not come into being for the sake of exchange.<sup>iii</sup>

This is the distinction between use-value and exchange-value which has<sup>4</sup> [been made] so famous by Karl Marx. But what is the difference for Marx? Let us see what Aristotle says about that.

Property of this kind<sup>iv</sup> i.e., for the purpose of subsistence<sup>v</sup> is evidently given by nature to all living beings, from the instant of their first birth to the days that their growth is finished. There are animals which, when their offspring is born, bring

<sup>iii</sup> *Politics* I.1257a6-13. Apparently Strauss's translation.

<sup>iv</sup> In Barker: “order.”

<sup>v</sup> In Barker: “[that is to say, for the purpose of subsistence].”

forth along with it food enough to support it until the animal can provide for itself: this is the case with insects which reproduce themselves by grubs, and of animals which do so by eggs. Animals which are viviparous have food for their offspring in themselves, for a certain time, of the nature of what is called milk.

If it is evident that there is such a natural provision for food for growth from birth (i.e., by nature),<sup>vi</sup> it is equally evident that we must believe that similar provision is made for adults. Plants exist to give subsistence to animals, and animals to give subsistence<sup>vii</sup> to men. Animals, when they are domesticated, serve for use as well as for food; wild animals, too, in most cases if not in all, serve to furnish man not only with food, but also with other comforts, such as<sup>viii</sup> clothing and similar aids to life. Accordingly, as nature makes nothing purposeless or in vain, all the aforesaid<sup>ix</sup> animals must have been made by nature for the sake of men.<sup>x</sup>

That is the passage I had in mind.

Now what can this tell us about the difference between Marx and Aristotle? According to Aristotle, the origin of true wealth is nature: nature supplies these things to us, which we modify, naturally, but the origin is nature. What is the Marxist view? Not only the Marxist view, Marx only radicalized it—the very clear statement, much prior to Marx, is Locke's: the origin of all wealth is *labor*. And Locke makes clear the implication of that: nature supplies us only with the almost worthless materials. We cannot deny that we need some gifts of nature, but they are, so to speak, nothing: they are almost worthless materials. In other words, according to that Lockean-Marxian view, the origin of true wealth is human production. This is not a doctrine limited to the sphere of property, but [one which] has universal significance. From the Aristotelian point of view, knowledge is the adequation of the intellect to the thing to be understood, i.e., knowledge is fundamentally receptive, dependent. According to the modern view, knowledge is something like organization of sense data. Knowledge is fundamentally constructive, not receptive. In other words, there is a strict parallel here to what we have observed regarding wealth.

Now you see<sup>5</sup> also in this passage that here “nature” is used in the singular. It is the same nature which supplies food to men, beasts, etc. Nature is the source of everything which is not made by man.<sup>6</sup> In order to bring out the relation between “nature” understood in the plural and “nature” in the singular, you may say nature is the source of the natures. Now in this passage which I read to you—this is a most striking and extraordinary passage—nature is presented as very friendly to man. Aristotle seems to express a very optimistic

<sup>vi</sup> Barker indicates that these words are an interpolation: “[If it is evident that there is thus a natural provision for food at birth, and during growth].” The clarification “i.e., by nature” is not in Barker.

<sup>vii</sup> Barker has “it” in the place of this occurrence of “subsistence.”

<sup>viii</sup> Barker’s “the provision of” is omitted.

<sup>ix</sup> The reader here inserts into Barker’s text “the aforesaid.”

<sup>x</sup> *Politics* I.1256b7-22. Barker translation.



view, a naively optimistic view. Let us leave it at this appearance for the moment and consider only the modern alternative, which is beautifully expressed in the very frequently used phrase “conquest of nature.” You don’t conquer something kind to you. Nature is here understood as enemy, by implication. The difficulty which is faced by the modern view, of course, is that the fact that man can conquer nature, that he has this in himself, he does not owe to himself, but to nature: that he is so equipped, if only with a potentiality, that he can become the master and owner of nature, in the words of Descartes.

Now if we look at the [First]<sup>xi</sup> Book of the *Politics* as a whole and the selection of the themes therein, we find first the proof that the polis is by nature, that is to say that the polis is a natural perfection of the natural associations, of the associations which are parts of the polis; and the most important of these parts is the family, or household. And secondly, we find a discussion of the household—very reasonably, because it is the most important part of the city. In the household as Aristotle understands it, three associations are united: male-female or husband-wife association; parent-children association; and the master-slave association. But only slavery is discussed here in the First Book, the reason being that any relevant details regarding the parent-child and husband-wife relation depend on the peculiar character of the political society. Say, in a stern, Puritan society, these relations differ very much from what they would be in a very permissive society. So you have to consider the society within which they occur, whereas the master-slave relation is relatively independent of this whole, as Aristotle implies.

Aristotle discusses there also the art or skill of acquisition, and especially the acquisition of money. In the First Book he shows that the family needs the city, that it is incomplete without the city. But this leads to a new question: What is the other way around? Once you have this city, a society large enough to defend itself, do you still need the family, the smaller association? This is the issue of communism, in the way in which it is a concern to Aristotle, and is taken up by Aristotle in the Second Book.

The Second Book is devoted to the examination of those political associations or communities which were regarded as being outstanding. For the fact that the city is natural does not mean, of course, that every city is in every respect according to nature. This is true even of a horse. A horse is a natural being, but it may be crippled by disease or by accident. So not every natural being is in every respect according to nature. And therefore we have to find out precisely what would be a city which is in every respect according to nature, according to the nature of the city. Aristotle pays equal attention to those which are famous and reputed to be good, and to those which are, as he puts it, “merely written” or, as we would call it, blueprinted. You see how little Aristotle is “quote a realist” in the colloquial sense of the term. And the reason is [that] it is by no means certain that any actual political order is simply good, therefore we have also to consider the blueprinted ones. Maybe they are superior in one respect or another.

Now Aristotle has however a special reason for the examination of the available political orders, and this he states at the beginning: “We will engage in this examination in order

<sup>xi</sup> The transcript has “third,” which is clearly an error.

to see what is correct and useful of the various institutions, and furthermore to avoid the impression that we are trying to show off our wisdom by presenting some other proposal.”<sup>xii</sup> By showing that the now-available political orders in fact or in blueprint are not good enough, Aristotle justifies<sup>7</sup> [engaging] in an investigation of his own. He excuses himself for his work, a thing which he does not do in his other writings. For example, when he begins to set forth his physics, where he discusses also the views of other people, he does not go on with fear that he might be misunderstood as someone who will show off his wisdom. The appearance of ambition, of the desire to show off, is more likely from Aristotle’s point of view in political matters than in other matters. Among purely theoretical men (this is the tacit assumption of Aristotle), this motive is not so powerful as in a sphere which at least borders on the marketplace.

Now the question guiding Aristotle’s examination of the available, reputedly good associations is this: Does political association mean a community of everything or only of some things? Of course, it cannot be communion in nothing, being a community. Now the maximum which is possible would be the community of women, children, and property. There could not possibly be a community of bodies. It is absolutely impossible to socialize a toothache or any other bodily affection. This is by nature private and can never be collectivized. But things which are not as much one’s own, as he puts it—things like women, wives, children, and property—can be collectivized. Now this of course is a proposal made in Plato’s *Republic* by Socrates, and it is the first theme of Aristotle’s criticism. The reason why Socrates tries to socialize or collectivize everything—going much, of course, beyond present-day communism—is that the city should be one to the greatest possible degree. Aristotle questions this attempt because a certain multiplicity is essential to the polis: if one makes it one too much, it will no longer be a city. The city<sup>8</sup> is by nature a multitude, and this means there is an absolute limit to unification. The city consists not only of many human beings, which no one denies, but of essentially different human beings, and different members of the political association fulfill different functions. If they all had the same function, it would no longer be a polis. This of course is admitted by Plato. As you know, in Plato’s *Republic* everyone is supposed to have an art, and accordingly there is a great variety of arts. The criterion for the goodness of a city is not according to Aristotle unity in any way, but self-sufficiency. More particularly, Aristotle objects to communism on the grounds that, as experience shows, common things are neglected. Everyone will think that somebody else will take care of it: in other words, there will be no individual responsibility. The trust that “George will do it” will lead to no one doing it. Or in regard to the family, to be the son of all citizens, as in Plato’s *Republic* the children will be, means to be no one’s son. The affection, friendship, of parents and children which becomes so universal becomes very watery, as Aristotle puts it, to say nothing of the fact that the communistic scheme as developed by Socrates wouldn’t work because people will recognize their own children, and then it will be impossible to maintain the universal relation.

Now it is unnecessary and unimportant to discuss all the Aristotelian arguments here, so I select some which are particularly characteristic. Now let me see.

<sup>xii</sup> *Politics* II.1260b32-34. Apparently Strauss’s translation.

There are also other difficulties regarding a community of wives and children,<sup>xiii</sup> which its advocates will not find it easy to meet by any precautions. We may take for example a case of assault, unintentional or intentional homicide, fighting, and slander.<sup>xiv</sup> All these offenses, when they are committed against father or mother or a near relative, differ from offenses against human beings who are not so related, in being breaches of<sup>xv</sup> piety. Such offenses must happen more frequently when men are ignorant of their relatives than when they know who they are; and when they do happen, the customary penance can be made when men know their relatives, but none can be made when they do not.<sup>xvi</sup> It is also surprising that Plato, after having made all the younger<sup>xvii</sup> men of the polis<sup>xviii</sup> the common sons of the<sup>xix</sup> citizens, should content himself with debarring older men who are “lovers” of the young from carnal intercourse with them, and should not debar them from behaving as “lovers” or practicing other familiarities. Such familiarities, if practiced between son and father, or brother and brother, are the very height of indecency, all the more as the mere cherishing of this form of love, without giving it actual expression, is in itself indecent.<sup>xx</sup>

Now this is a very characteristic argument of Aristotle: he appeals here to the accepted notion of decency without in any way making an attempt to *prove*<sup>9</sup> to people these sound notions. In connection with what I said before about the fact that decency and its specific meaning in various respects, [this] is simply taken for granted and not deduced by Aristotle.

To come to a broader argument: what makes men care for other men to the highest degree is the private—one’s own—and preciousness. But these two conditions will not be fulfilled if women and children are in common: they will be no *one*’s wives or children, and since there are innumerable females who are called his wives and innumerable children who are called his children, they lack the quality of preciousness. Aristotle also refers to a great difficulty in Plato’s *Republic*, namely, that the gifted children of the lower class will be transferred to the upper class, and they of course would know their natural parents and might even become attached to them, because<sup>10</sup> [it] is not recognizable at the moment of their birth whether they have a high IQ or other important qualities or not.

Regarding property, Aristotle points out the great nuisances which result if men have everything in common. He refers to the experiences of fellow-travelers (not in the

<sup>xiii</sup> In Barker: “There are also other difficulties in a system of community of wives and children.”

<sup>xiv</sup> The exact wording in Barker: “We may take as examples cases of assault, unintentional (and, we may also add, intentional) homicide, fighting, and slander.”

<sup>xv</sup> Here the reader omits “natural.”

<sup>xvi</sup> Barker’s exact rendering of the phrase: “and when they do happen, the customary penance can be made if men know their relatives, but none can be made if they are ignorant of them.”

<sup>xvii</sup> In Barker: “young.”

<sup>xviii</sup> In Barker: “state.”

<sup>xix</sup> Barker here inserts “older.”

<sup>xx</sup> *Politics* II.1262a25-37.

metaphorical sense, of course, but in the simple sense): the collisions with one another on trifling matters when you are in a small space and together all the time. So without private property, without a private sphere, human life would be absolutely unbearable. But there is something true in communism which however cannot be brought about by communism, namely, that what belongs to friends is absolutely common. In other words, this precisely means that everyone has his own which he shares with his friends.

Now let us see . . . .

It is clear from what has been said that the better system is that under which property is privately owned but is put to common use; and the function proper to the legislator is to make men so disposed, to educate them in such a manner, that they will treat property in this way.

There is a further consideration, namely that of pleasure: here too to think of a thing as your own makes an unsayable difference.<sup>xxi</sup> The satisfaction of a natural feeling brings pleasure;<sup>xxii</sup> and it may well be that regard for oneself, or self-love, and by extension, for what is one's own<sup>xxiii</sup> is a feeling implanted by nature, and not a mere<sup>xxiv</sup> impulse. Self-love is rightly censured, but what is truly<sup>xxv</sup> censured is not so much love of oneself as excessive love of oneself—<sup>xxvi</sup> just as we also blame the lover of money not so much for loving money as for loving it in excess;<sup>xxvii</sup> the simple feeling of love for any of these things<sup>xxviii</sup> is more or less universal. We may add that a very great pleasure is to be found in doing an act of kindness, in giving help to friends or guests or comrades;<sup>xxix</sup> and such kindness and help become possible only when property is privately owned. But not only are these pleasures<sup>xxx</sup> impossible under a system of excessive unification of the city. The activities of two forms of virtue are also obviously destroyed. The first of these is temperance in the matter of sexual relations (it is an act of decency and virtue to refrain from loving the wife of another): and the second is liberality in the use of property.<sup>xxxi</sup>

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xxi: In Barker: "There is a further consideration which must be taken into account. This is the consideration of pleasure. Here too [as well as in the matter of goodness] to think of a thing as your own makes an inexpressible difference."

xxii: Barker indicates that "[The satisfaction of a natural feeling brings pleasure]" is interpolated.

xxiii: In Barker "[and, by extension, for what is one's own]" is an interpolation.

xxiv: The insertion of "random" occurs here in Barker.

xxv: In the place of "truly" Barker writes "really."

xxvi: Barker uses the phrase "love of oneself in excess."

xxvii: Barker indicates interpolation of "[not so much for loving money as for loving it in excess]."

xxviii: The reader omits Barker's interpolation "[self, or property, or money]."

xxix: The phrase is worded so in Barker: "We may add that a very great pleasure is to be found in doing a kindness and giving some help to friends, or guests, or comrades."

xxx: Here Barker inserts the interpolation "[that arising from the satisfaction of a natural feeling of self-love, and that arising from the satisfaction of our impulse to help others]."

xxxi: Barker specifies his rendering of the two kinds of virtuous activity so: "The first of these is temperance in the matter of sexual relations (it is an act of moral value to refrain from loving the

So you see here the kind of argument. We know by virtue of being properly brought up that temperance and self-control on the one hand, and liberality on the other, are virtues. The practice of these virtues becomes impossible if there is no private property and if there is no privacy of wives, and therefore communism contradicts the fundamental requirements of morality.

Now what is the overall impression which Aristotle has of Plato's *Republic*? He is very much impressed by the attractiveness of the *Republic*. I believe for quite a few modern readers, whatever they may think about the wisdom of the proposition, it is attractive. What is the secret of that attractiveness, according to Aristotle? If I could elicit from you a reaction, what you find attractive in the *Republic*, it would be quite helpful and illuminating. . . . But I expected not to get an answer. [Laughter]

Aristotle says that this arrangement as suggested by Socrates in the *Republic* is "beautiful to look at," and "the hearer accepts it gladly." Why? Because he thinks "there will be a wonderful friendship toward all human beings in such a society. Especially when someone criticizes things as they are now, and says they are so bad now because of the lack of the community of property, meaning lawsuits and false witnesses, and flattery of the rich." All these kinds of things which we have in our society and all societies which ever were, they will be absent from such a society. But Aristotle says [that] these vices, these things which are truly ugly, "are caused not by the absence of community of property, but by human wickedness." Therefore the way of curing these ills, to the extent that they can be cured, is good upbringing and not communism.

Aristotle gives an additional reason against Plato's *Republic*. He says: "if these proposals were sound, then people would have become aware of them before. Because everything has been discovered already, in a manner, but some of the things have not been brought together, and others, things which are known, in fact are not used."<sup>xxxii</sup>

So you see the claim to novelty which Aristotle can raise: that he may be able to bring together institutions which have hitherto not been brought together. But he denies that there are any institutions which as such have not become known. Aristotle does not say that everything that is, is reasonable. But he says what is reasonable is somehow known, which is obviously not the same.

Finally, he gives the following broad argument. The recommendation of the scheme of the *Republic* is that it contributes most to the happiness of the citizens. Then somewhere in the *Republic* the question is raised: Who is happy there? The answer is, roughly: Well, no one in particular, but the city as a whole.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Aristotle says: Well, happiness is not of the nature of such things as odd numbers, or for that matter, even numbers.<sup>xxxiv</sup> You can

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wife of another in the strength of temperance): the second is liberality in the use of property." *Politics* II.1263a37-b11.

<sup>xxxii</sup> II.1263b15-23, 1264a1-5. Apparently Strauss's translation.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> *Rep.* 419a-421c; see also 466a, 519e-520a.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> At *Politics* II.1264b15 ff.

easily get an even number by adding two odd numbers; you cannot get a happy society by adding together unhappy individuals. So this much about . . . This only shows again the crucial importance of the individual and his satisfaction, which is the argument of Aristotle against Plato's communism. Aristotle does not speak of the right of individuals; one could say [that] on the one hand he speaks of the responsibility of the citizen, of the good man, of the virtue of the individual, and on the other hand of the pleasures which the individual needs for feeling well. The concept of right in our sense is absent from here.

We now turn to a discussion of another blueprint which is the most important of these, apart from the Platonic ones, which Aristotle discusses. I will begin to read it. This is the scheme of a man called Hippodamus. [LS writes on the blackboard] You may not have heard his name; almost nothing is known of him except what Aristotle tells us here in the Second Book of the *Politics*. But he is nevertheless obviously not a great man, as you will soon see, but a remarkable man. Now what does Aristotle tell us about him? He begins as follows.

Hippodamus the son of Euryphon, citizen of Miletus, was the first man without having engaged in politics, who attempted to handle the theme of the best constitution.<sup>xxxv</sup> He was a man who invented the planning of towns in separate quarters, and laid out the Peiraeus with regular roads. In his general life, too,<sup>xxxvi</sup> he was led into some eccentricity by a desire to attract attention; and this made a number of people feel that he lived in too studied and overdone<sup>xxxvii</sup> a manner. He wore his hair long and expensively adorned: he had flowing robes, expensively decorated, made from a cheap but warm material (*laughter*), which he wore in summer time as well as in winter; and he aspired to be learned about nature generally.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Now this is not Aristotle's way of speaking about other people. That sounds like rather malicious gossip [*laughter*]. So he must have another reason. For example, when he discussed Plato or Socrates, he said something about the Socratic speeches, their peculiar charm, attractiveness, and gracefulness. And he said: Well, it is too much to expect that in addition they should be *true*!<sup>xxxix</sup> That is obviously something quite different.

In order to understand, [to] appreciate fully this remark, we must give proper weight to what Aristotle said: that he was the first man not engaged in politics who attempted to discuss the best political order. A man not engaged in politics who attempts to discuss the best political order: one can say that is Aristotle's definition of the political philosopher.

<sup>xxxv</sup> This reading differs slightly from Barker's translation: "Hippodamus the son of Euryphon, a citizen of Miletus, was the first man without practical experience of politics who attempted to handle the theme of the best form of constitution."

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Barker inserts here the interpolation "[apart from these innovations]."

<sup>xxxvii</sup> The reader substitutes "overdone" for "artificial."

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Barker concludes this statement with the interpolation "[as well as about town-planning]."

*Politics* II.1267b22-30.

<sup>xxxix</sup> *Politics* II.1265a10 ff.

Therefore, we can say Hippodamus was the first political philosopher. But what a terrible thing, that the first political philosopher cut such an atrocious figure. That has something to do with this problematic character of politics, to which we have already alluded and to which we will come back very soon. Now a scheme of Hippodamus, with which I will not bore you, consists of dividing everything—citizen body, laws, etc.—into three. The number three is apparently supplied by a certain philosophy of nature on which he drew. The consequence is of course that everything is very simple and clear: everywhere you find three. But as Aristotle makes tacitly clear, precisely for this reason, because of its extreme simplicity, very great confusion follows. That is to say, Hippodamus doesn't give attention to what is peculiar to the political, that this doesn't have the clarity and simplicity which the starred heaven, at least to the unarmed eye, possesses. In other words, no understanding of the fact that the political is in a class by itself and cannot be interpreted on the basis of concepts supplied by science dealing with the subhuman.

There is one proposal of Hippodamus which is especially important for Aristotle, one among many, only Aristotle thinks that it is crucial. Hippodamus proposed that those who invent something useful for the city would receive some honor. Well, we take this for granted, that it is a wise practice, but for Aristotle that is questionable. Aristotle discusses this proposal at great length, because this proposal, which seems to be trivial, goes in his opinion to the root of things. I read to you:

In regard to the further question raised by Hippodamus—whether some honor ought not to be conferred on those who suggest an improvement which is of benefit to the city—we may argue that legislation in such a sense cannot be safely enacted, and has only a specious sound. It might encourage false accusations<sup>xli</sup> against the reformers, and perhaps lead<sup>xlii</sup> to political disturbances. But the proposal also involves another problem, and suggests a further argument. There are some thinkers who raise a doubt whether states lose or gain by changing their traditional laws when some other and better law is possible. If, on this issue, we take the line that change is *not* a gain, it is difficult to agree readily with the proposal made by Hippodamus; for changes which are in fact<sup>xliii</sup> subversive of the laws, or of the whole political order,<sup>xliiii</sup> may be proposed on the plea that they tend to the common good. However, as the issue has now been mentioned, it will be as well to define our views about it a little further. It is, as we have said, an issue which we can debate,<sup>xliv</sup> and a case can be made for the view that change is the better policy. Certainly in other branches of knowledge change has proved beneficial. We may cite in evidence the changes from traditional practice which have been made in medicine, in physical training, and generally in all the arts and forms of human skill; and since politics has to be counted as an art or form of

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<sup>xli</sup> Barker interpolates here “of revolutionary plans.”

<sup>xlii</sup> Here Barker inserts “in this way.”

<sup>xliii</sup> Barker puts “really” in the place of “in fact.”

<sup>xliiii</sup> In the place of “the whole political order” Barker writes “the constitution.”

<sup>xliv</sup> In Barker: “which is in debate.”

human<sup>xlv</sup> skill, it can be reasonably argued<sup>xlvi</sup> that the same must<sup>xlvii</sup> be true of politics. It can also be argued that the actual facts<sup>xlviii</sup> provide an indication of the benefits of change.<sup>xlix</sup> The usages of old times were exceedingly simple and uncivilized: Greeks went about armed, and bought their brides from each other.

Imagine.

Indeed the relics of ancient customs which are still in existence, here and there, are utterly absurd: there is, for example, a law at Cyme, relating to homicide, that if an accuser can produce a definite number of witnesses from his own kinsmen, the<sup>l</sup> accused shall be liable to the charge of murder. [Laughter] All men, as a rule, seek to follow, not the ancestral, but the good,<sup>li</sup> and the earliest known human beings, whether they were “earth-born,” or survivors of some cataclysm, were in all probability similar to ordinary or even foolish people today.<sup>lii</sup> It would therefore be an absurdity always to stick to<sup>liii</sup> their notions.<sup>liv</sup>

I think I will leave it at that. What is the point which Aristotle makes? . . . Aristotle does not deny that in the arts, medicine, etc., progress has been made. On the contrary, in parallel passages you will find he has said that progress is of the essence of the arts. There are always greater refinements possible, and that is the law of an art or skill, to progress indefinitely. But the question is: Is what is true of the arts true of laws or politics? The first argument is: Why not?<sup>li</sup> Politics too is a form of art or skill. But the difficulties to which he alludes at the beginning, I must not forget. Technological changes, he will say, may very well lead to political changes, therefore you cannot simply approve of technological change: you must have your eyes open regarding possible political change. And if the political change is desirable, change for the better, then all right, but if the political change is not a change for the better, then you have to wonder whether technological progress should be promoted. You have to take first the simpler view, the view held by Hippodamus: it is obviously sound to change laws because the laws stem from the olden time, from a time when men were less enlightened and less civilized than now, naturally. And especially the principle [that] we—all men—who know, who have any understanding, seek not the ancestral as ancestral, the traditional as traditional, but the good. And if there is a difference between the traditional or ancestral and the good, we will choose the good.

<sup>xlv</sup> The repetition of “human” is not in Barker.

<sup>xlvi</sup> In Barker: “it can be argued logically.”

<sup>xlvii</sup> Barker inserts here “also”

<sup>xlviii</sup> Barker interpolates “[of history].”

<sup>xlix</sup> Barker presents as an interpolation “[of the benefits of change].”

<sup>l</sup> Barker inserts here the word “person.”

<sup>li</sup> In Barker: “not the line of tradition, but some idea of the good.”

<sup>lii</sup> The reader omits this parenthetical insertion: “(Indeed that is actually the tale that is told of the ‘earth-born’ men.)”

<sup>liii</sup> In Barker, not “always to stick to” but “to remain constant to.”

<sup>liv</sup> *Politics* II.1268b22-1269a8.



Now there is a connection between this view and Hippodamus' simple and clear proposal regarding the number three. As we easily can see, this phenomenon of Hippodamus has in a somewhat modified form renewed itself in modern times [in] a phenomenon called political radicalism. It has a different name in this country. I believe it is called liberalism. It is characterized by reliance on simple proposals and [the view that] what is true of technological change is also true of political change. Now after having stated the<sup>12</sup> [case] for Hippodamus and his life, he states the case for the other point of view, what we can call the conservative argument to the extent to which we can apply this notion to ancient discussions.

Now while these arguments go to show that in some cases and at some times law ought to be changed, there is another point of view from which it would appear that change is a matter which needs great caution. When we reflect that the improvements likely to be effected may be small, and that it is a bad thing to accustom men to abrogate laws lightly—

[change of tape]

**LS:** —to change the practice of an art is not the same as to change the practice of law. It is from habit, and only from habit, that law derives the validity which ensures obedience. But habit can be created only by the passage of time, and the readiness to change from actually existing to new laws will accordingly tend to weaken the general power of law.

This is not so easy for us to understand, because in modern times generally, owing to the concept of the sovereign and sovereignty, lawmaking and quick changes of law have become more or less a matter of course. We need therefore some effort of imagination to understand the older point of view. The key point which Aristotle makes is, I think, directly intelligible: the analogy of art and law, of art and politics, of art and the polis, is questioned because, while the arts owe their power to their evident reasonableness, [in] that this manipulation, this operation, is manifestly conducive to bring about the desired result, law owes its power to custom or habit *alone*, as Aristotle says here . . . not to its intrinsic reasonableness. And therefore it must be treated in a radically different way from the arts. This is an issue which is of course still with us.<sup>13</sup> What Aristotle has in mind may be developed along these lines: that the polis as polis, in contradistinction to the arts as arts, has a recalcitrance to reason, a recalcitrance which cannot be overcome—a thought which is expressed by Plato in his simile of the cave. The cave is a sphere beneath the earth. Political man as political man lives in that cave, and he can never leave it and live in the light of the sun. I read to you from a *Federalist* paper of uncertain origin, at least as my edition says. It is number 49.

If it be true that all governments rest on opinion, it is no less true that the strength of opinion in each individual, and its practical influence on his conduct, depend much on the number which he supposes to have entertained the same opinion. The reason of man, like man himself, is timid and cautious when left alone, and acquires firmness and confidence in proportion to the number with which it is associated. When the examples which fortify opinion are ancient as well as

numerous, they are known to have a double effect. In a nation of philosophers, this consideration ought to be disregarded.

because neither the antiquity of the opinion nor the number of people holding it is, of course, of any relevance philosophically.

A reverence for the laws would be sufficiently inculcated by the voice of an enlightened reason. But a nation of philosophers is as little to be expected as the philosophical race of kings wished for by Plato. And in every other nation, the most rational government will not find it a superfluous advantage to have the prejudices of the community on its side.<sup>lv</sup>

There are many other statements, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, of this kind. I remind you of Edmund Burke's saying, a very extreme statement: "In proportion as the primitive rights of man are metaphysically true"—meaning theoretically true—"they are morally and politically false."<sup>lvi</sup>

A very strong statement, "in *proportion*" . . . . But the most amusing formulation of this which I know, you will find in some passages in Macaulay's *History of England*, from which I will read. It deals with something recognized by present-day political science, but I believe not properly interpreted. Speaking of the abdication of James II, Macaulay says:

It was not easy to draw up any form of words which would please all whose assent it was important to obtain; but at length, out of many suggestions offered from different quarters, a resolution was framed which gave general satisfaction.<sup>lvii</sup>

This resolution has been many times subjected to criticism as minute and severe as was ever applied to any sentence ever written by man [LS: that is a typical exaggeration of Macaulay's] and there perhaps never was a sentence written by man which would bear such criticism less.

Then he gives some examples of that.<sup>lviii</sup>

It is idle, however, to examine these memorable words as we should examine a chapter of Aristotle or Hobbes. Such words are to be considered not as words, but

<sup>lv</sup> *Federalist* 49 (Madison), *The Federalist*, introduction by E. M. Earle (Washington, D.C.: National Home Library Foundation, n.d.).

<sup>lvi</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in *Works*, 2:335. The actual quotation reads: "The pretended rights of these theorists are all extremes; and in proportion as they are metaphysically true, they are morally and politically false."

<sup>lvii</sup> Macaulay continues: "It was moved that King James the Second, having endeavored to subvert the constitution of the kingdom by breaking the original contract between King and people, and, by the advice of Jesuits and other wicked persons, having violated the fundamental laws, and having withdrawn himself out of the kingdom, had abdicated the government, and that the throne had thereby become vacant."

<sup>lviii</sup> Some sentences intervene before the occurrence of those quoted next.

as deeds. If they effect that which they are intended to effect, they are rational though they may be contradictory. If they fail of attaining their end, they are absurd, though they carry demonstration with them. Logic admits of no compromise. The essence of politics is compromise.<sup>lix</sup>

I will look at a few others in the same *History*. Here he speaks of the Toleration Act, passed by Parliament shortly after the Revolution:

Of all the acts that have ever been passed by Parliament, the Toleration Act is perhaps that which most strikingly illustrates the peculiar vices and the peculiar excellences of English legislation.<sup>lx</sup> The perfect lawgiver is a just temper between the mere man of theory, who can see nothing but general principles, and the man of business, who can see nothing but particular circumstances.<sup>lxi</sup> In English legislation, the practical sentiment<sup>lxii</sup> has always predominated, and not seldom unduly predominated, over the theoretical.<sup>lxiii</sup> To think nothing of symmetry, and much of convenience; never to remove an anomaly merely because it is an anomaly; never to innovate except when some grievance is felt; never to innovate except insofar as to get rid of the grievance; never to lay down any proposition of wider extent than the particular case for which it is necessary to provide; these are the rules which have, from the age of John to the age of Victoria, generally guided the deliberations of our two hundred and fifty Parliaments. Our national distaste for whatever is abstract in political science amounts undoubtedly to a fault.

He does not think of Lord Bertrand Russell<sup>lxiv</sup> here, of course.

Yet it is, perhaps, a fault on the right side. That we have been far too slow to improve our laws must be admitted. But, though in other countries there may occasionally have been more rapid progress, it would not be easy to name any other in which there has been so little retrogression.

The Toleration Act approaches very near to the idea of a great English law. To a jurist, versed in the theory of legislation, but not intimately acquainted with the temper of the sects and parties in which the nation was divided at the time of the Revolution, that Act would seem to be a mere chaos and contradiction.<sup>lxv</sup> It will not bear to be tried by sound general principles. Nay, it will not bear to be tried by *any* principle, sound or unsound.<sup>lxvi</sup>

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<sup>lix</sup> Macaulay, *History of England*, chap. 10, in *Works of Lord Macaulay Complete in Eight Volumes* (London: Longmans, Green, & co., 1873), 2:366-67.

<sup>lx</sup> Text is omitted from the quotation.

<sup>lxi</sup> Lines are omitted.

<sup>lxii</sup> In the place of "sentiment" Macaulay has "element."

<sup>lxiii</sup> In the place of "theoretical" Macaulay has "speculative."

<sup>lxiv</sup> Mentioned in session 7.

<sup>lxv</sup> Macaulay has "chaos of absurdities and contradictions."

<sup>lxvi</sup> The reader omits text from the end of this paragraph (in Macaulay) and from the beginning of its successor.

... But these very faults may appear to be merits, when we take into account<sup>lxvii</sup> the passions and prejudices of those for whom the Toleration Act was framed.<sup>lxviii</sup>

I do not wish to continue this now, but there is another discussion of a British measure of the late seventeenth century, where he argues as follows: the major—there is of course a syllogism there, the major and minor and conclusion—the major did not fit the minor, and the conclusion did not follow from the major and the minor. But the major brought two hundred votes and the minor two hundred, and the conclusion: the same, therefore the thing passed.<sup>lxx</sup> This he thinks is characteristic of political arguments as distinguished from theoretical arguments.

This,<sup>14</sup> [and] also what Burke says, [goes of course] much beyond what Aristotle says, but there is something important in common, which one can call in general terms fundamental recalcitrance of the polis to strictly theoretical reasoning. Aristotle says here in the Hippodamus section that the law's power is due entirely to custom or habit, not to its intrinsic reasonableness. This seems to contradict another statement of his according to which the law is a dictate of reason: as he puts it, it is a speech, or pronouncement, stemming from practical wisdom and understanding.<sup>lxx</sup> Law is a dictate of reason: classical and Thomistic definition. But Aristotle says, you will note, in the *Ethics*: speech derivative from *some* practical wisdom.<sup>lxxi</sup> But another reason why there is a difference between the Thomistic and the Aristotelian teaching is this. According to Aristotle, laws—that is, all interesting laws—must be given with a view to the political order. Democratic laws differ from monarchic laws, oligarchic laws differ from democratic, etc. But most political orders you will find in effect are more or less defective, hence the laws given for them, to the extent to which they are given for them, cannot be simply reasonable. A certain adaptation to the political order, that is to say, to the opinions regarding justice which were known to these orders, is necessary. Now this leads me to the discussion given by Aristotle in Book 3, to which I will turn after mentioning only one point regarding Aristotle's discussion of the actual regimes which are supposed to be good, namely, Sparta, Crete, and Carthage. Now only one point must I mention: that one of these beautiful cities was Carthage—not a Greek city. This alone suffices to prove that the translation of *polis* by “Greek city-state” is impossible. “City,” yes, but not “Greek.” It is an accident that there are more Greek cities than non-Greek cities. The city is not as such a Greek institution.

Book 3, to which I will turn now, contains the fundamental discussion of Aristotle's *Politics*. Of course one should read if one can the whole *Politics*, but precisely if one does so, one will find that the fundamental discussions are those in the Third Book. Let us read the beginning: “He who makes inquiries about the *politeiai*, which each of them is and

<sup>lxvii</sup> Macaulay has “consideration.”

<sup>lxviii</sup> Macaulay, *History*, chap. 11, in *Works* 2:463-65.

<sup>lxx</sup> Apparently a reference to *Works* 2:367 (“They cared little whether their major agreed with their conclusion, if the major secured two hundred votes, and the conclusion two hundred more”).

<sup>lxx</sup> *Politics* III.1287a30.

<sup>lxxi</sup> *NE* X.1180a22.

what their character is, for him about the first inquiry is regarding the polis, what then a polis is.”<sup>lxxii</sup> Now this is a very strange beginning, for we know already what the polis is, don’t we? Of course the polis is the theme of political philosophy. Why then does Aristotle raise the question of the polis again? We learn now from this very beginning (we might have learned before if we had read every passage, but nowhere as visible as here) that the theme of political philosophy for Aristotle is not the polis but the *politeia*. I will now just use the Greek term because the question of how to translate it is not easy to answer. I would like to mention only one fact: that *Politeia* is the Greek title, the correct title, of Plato’s *Republic*. So not polis, but *politeia*.

Here Aristotle makes the strange proposal that we are interested in the polis and must find out what the polis is only because we are interested in the *politeia*, in the various forms of *politeia*. What is the reason? Hitherto we have learned that the polis is by nature; that it is by nature the peak or end of all other associations; that the polis is all-comprehensive and therefore directed towards the highest good; that it must recognize the independence of the private, namely, of the family or household, not so much in the sense of a private sphere in which everyone can do what he lists, but rather in the sphere of individual responsibility. “Political” is what has to do with the polis, and therefore people can ask: What is the political? and give all kinds of more or less far-fetched answers which would not be possible if the polis were remembered. Everyone knows, of course, in a way what the political and nonpolitical are. Voting is a political action, buying food is not as such a political action but it can become [so] by accident, such as if you fetch some sandwiches for a man running for office who has no time to buy them himself. But this is an exception, it proves the rule. Yet the word “political” has another meaning, with which you are all familiar: This is politics, I don’t want to have anything to do with it. Now what does “politics” mean here? Not simply dirty business, of course, because that you can find in other spheres of life. But the key point is [that] this is divisive. Say, what an Internal Revenue collector does is not as such political, because this is the law that you have to pay taxes and that is no longer, at least, a political issue.

When we speak of “political” in a negative way, we mean its divisive character, in the first place. Now this divisive character of politics is taken up by Aristotle, but strangely and remarkably not as the seamy side of politics, as we would first see it, but as essential to the highest purpose of the polis. Aristotle goes on to say: So why must we ask what the polis is, although we are concerned with the *politeia*? I believe it would be very unfriendly not to explain what “*politeia*” means, very briefly. The usual translation, I suppose also followed by Barker, is “constitution”—a translation one could accept if “constitution” were meant in the way one may speak of a man’s strong constitution, for example. In this sense it would be tolerable, but this we do not mean when we speak of constitution. Our understanding of constitution has gone through, presupposes historically, the concept of fundamental laws of the land, a distinction which began to be made in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, I don’t remember which one. For example, [that] the king in France had to be a man—no woman could become sovereign—or that the royal domain could not be disposed of by the king, and so on. These were fundamental laws which would not be changed except by the king. All other laws were

<sup>lxxii</sup> *Politics* III.1272b32-34. Strauss’s translation.

non-fundamental,<sup>15</sup> [they] could be changed. The key point is that *politeiai* are not any laws. “*Politeia*” is used by Aristotle frequently in contradistinction to laws, fundamental or not fundamental. It would be simpler to say that “*politeia*” designates primarily the factual order of ruling, of power, which is at the very bottom of any legislation and which is in a way the cause of all legislation, because the ruling part of the city gives the laws with a view to its ruling. That does not necessarily mean to its own advantage—that is a nasty interpretation because it is at least thinkable that a ruling group rules with a view to the interests of the whole. Now if this is so, the key question in any political order is this: What kind of men are preponderant in this political society, rule in their own right, not by any delegation? President Johnson of course doesn’t rule in his own right, he rules by elected delegation. In every society we find some man or body of men who rule in their own right. May I ask you who that is in the United States?

**Student:** The people.

**LS:** Yes, some men or body of men who rule in their own right, not by derivation. And the key question for Aristotle is: What kind of men rule in political society? This question in Aristotle’s view is inseparable from the question: To what end is that society dedicated? Decent men—to take a very simple case from a children’s book—decent men will be dedicated to decency, and indecent men will be dedicated to various forms of indecency. We can make subdivisions, as we shall see. So the question of the *politeia*—I translate it by the term “regime,” the best that has occurred to me, and I shall accept a better one as soon as I learn of it—the various regimes, the variety of regimes, not the polis as polis, is the subject of Aristotle’s political science. The point is this. The political issue is not the polis. People are not concerned politically with whether they should live in political society and have governments or not, but in what kind of society and what kind of government. The practical issue is not the issue which never becomes a political issue, but a divisive issue, namely—well, in a happy society it does not become practically divisive, but in principle it is divisive. We understand this today immediately because we are in the very unfortunate situation of the Cold War. And the Cold War is of course not merely a conflict between two states, the United States and Russia, but between two kinds of regimes . . . what we call liberal democracy, on the one hand, and communism on the other.

In the nineteenth century and in the halcyon days prior to World War I, this fact was greatly obscured. Men like Plato and Xenophon were severely criticized by modern historians of Greece as bad citizens because they did not simply and unqualifiedly identify themselves with the city of Athens. But after we have seen how many people were compelled to fight on the wrong side from the point of view of simple patriotism in these last twenty or thirty years, we see again that the simple, unqualified identification with the country of one’s birth is possible only in very [happy], or at least in relatively happy, times. In the early twentieth century, patriotism or, as it was called at that time, nationalism, could be taken for granted, there was no question about that. Most regimes, at least in the Western world, were relatively decent and no fundamental issue arose. Patriotism and/or nationalism were taken for granted as always a natural basis. The possibility of fundamental dissension, of civil war, was not taken seriously enough,

except of course by the communists. In the English Civil War, in the seventeenth century, patriots were a *party*: the patriots here, the Royalists there. At that time patriotism was not taken for granted. It meant to take the side of the sovereignty of the people against the sovereignty of the king. Now the defeat of the doctrine of the divine right of kings, which was completed by the French Revolution and its consequences, made the sovereignty of the people the basis of political theory. And this is of course true today everywhere: the communist doctrine [and] the fascist doctrine, are explicitly based on the sovereignty of the people—only they have some qualifications: that it is best for the sovereignty of the only part of the people that is truly people, that is, the proletariat, that there be a dictatorship of the proletariat. This is only a modification of the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people. On this basis the doctrines of Aristotle were simply unintelligible. We begin to understand them now out of our experience.

I will leave it at that. Is there any point which one could take up in the few minutes we still have?

**Mr. Bruell:** Would you say that the subject of the *Republic* is more the polis?

**LS:** That is a long question, because “*politeia*” has more than one meaning, and the most important one is the one which I sketched: regime. But it can also mean to lead the life of a citizen. This ambiguity is very important in that case.

**Student:** Could we, from a close reading of Aristotle’s *Politics*, see that he has seen implications of his teaching for collectivization of thought, as distinguished from collectivization of . . .

**LS:** No, in the sense in which we mean it we couldn’t, because what we call ideologies did not exist. When you read the discussion of the variety of regimes in the Eighth or Ninth Book of Plato’s *Republic* (that is clearer than in Aristotle’s *Politics*), there are certain opinions which go with different regimes. For example, the opinion going with democracy is that the end of political life is freedom, whereas oligarchy thinks in terms of wealth. These are opinions going with certain parts of society. I mean, ordinarily a rich man is not democratic and a poor man is not oligarchic. Aristotle makes very clear that the rivalry between oligarchy and democracy, very crudely speaking, is that of the rich and the poor. But there is no ideology for the very simple reason that everyone says in a very straightforward manner exactly what he is after. Of course, a certain element of hypocrisy—if it was hypocrisy, it can also have been self-deception—naturally went with those things. The honest democrats and the honest oligarchs believe that freedom as the democrats understand it and wealth as the oligarchs understand it is the best for the polis. But not in the name of some ideology, but simply saying: How can you have a city which defends itself well, which has the proper naval and other equipment, if there are not wealthy people around to pay for that? And similar considerations regarding freedom, of course. And that is not an ideology, an ideology is some form of theoretical thing—I would say pseudo-theoretical, but let us take a more lenient view and say: something which seems to stem from theoretical considerations and that is absent from these earlier doctrines.

**Student:** Just straightforward selfishness.

**LS:** It does not have to be selfishness, but it does not go beyond the political. For example, if, say, somewhere a tribe in Africa refuses to be ruled by people wholly alien to them, I would hesitate to call this nationalism. Because nationalism is a certain theory, and you don't need a theory. This grows up with men living together with people whose language they do not understand. They may permit them to live among them, but they don't wish to be ruled by them. Do you see this simple difference between a natural reaction which doesn't match any elaboration, and theoretical considerations?

**Student:** There would be, for example, rights of Englishmen but no rights of man.

**LS:** Yes, you can put it this way. The natural right of man is a doctrine of philosophic origin, in other words. We may have an occasion to speak of that later.

We must now make this deplorable interruption of three meetings, one and a half weeks, after which we will return, if everything goes well, to the question of the *politeia*—I mean, of the potentiality of civil war. Nothing less than that is implied in the Aristotelian doctrine of *politeia*.

[end of session]

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<sup>1</sup> Deleted "and"

<sup>2</sup> Deleted "than."

<sup>3</sup> Deleted "Things are."

<sup>4</sup> Deleted "become."

<sup>5</sup> Deleted "here."

<sup>6</sup> Deleted "You may."

<sup>7</sup> Deleted "that he engages."

<sup>8</sup> Deleted "consists not only—the city."

<sup>9</sup> Deleted "them."

<sup>10</sup> Deleted "this."

<sup>11</sup> Deleted "because."

<sup>12</sup> Deleted "point."

<sup>13</sup> Deleted "One may speak."

<sup>14</sup> Moved "goes of course."

<sup>15</sup> Deleted "which."



**Session 12: no date**

**Leo Strauss:** Political life or political action is concerned with either preservation or change: the preservation of what is good and change for the better. This implies some opinion of what is good or bad, and opinion as such points to knowledge. The complete knowledge of what is involved in political things would be the knowledge of what constitutes the good society. This is the full political good, the common good, and this was the concern of political philosophy as long as it was recognized. Now we are concerned today with the situation in which political philosophy has lost its plausibility, the belief in its possibility, although the general reasoning which I sketched now and again has still its former evidence. Now this is due in the first place to the power of what we call positivism . . . the view that the highest form of knowledge, nay, the only form of knowledge, is scientific knowledge . . . the view which we traced to August Comte, who coined the term “positive philosophy.” Now in Comte’s point of view, [at] the stage in which science is predominant, there must be rule of the men of science as a kind of spiritual power belonging to the modern world. We all know that this notion has lost all credibility, although it still lingers on in various places. For example, the Supreme Court makes decisions on the basis of pronouncements of social science; then we see something of this kind. It is nominally referred to as the problem of technocracy, which, as technocracy, is not democracy.

Now the key point concerning Comte’s doctrine of the three stages, theological, metaphysical, and positive, [is this]. In the earlier stages (theological and metaphysical), men were concerned primarily with the Why, with first causes and ultimate ends. But in scientific study it can be limited to the How. The difficulty here is that the theological and metaphysical questions, while being excluded by science, still remain: they remain questions. To avoid the difficulty one must declare that these questions are not only not answerable scientifically, but that they are meaningless. As a moment’s reflection shows, this fails, however.

This is not the immediate difficulty we have, for it is caused by a development long after Comte: the distinction between fact and value, that no value judgment as such can be a rational judgment. We must take this together with the rejection of metaphysics. The questions which concern men most deeply, the most important questions, are beyond the competence of science, and this leads necessarily to the flight from scientific reason—a triumph of science itself, about which you are aware, if not from books, at least from articles in the most sophisticated magazines. The key consideration, the only one which I would like to repeat because it goes to the root of the matter, is that according to the strict understanding of positivism, only scientific knowledge is genuine knowledge. This is in blatant contradiction to the fact that science, and especially positivistic science, rests on prescientific knowledge, or common-sense knowledge, and this common-sense knowledge can in no way be transformed into scientific knowledge, as can be shown by looking at the most interesting cases. Common-sense knowledge, which is the basis of scientific knowledge, is unaware of the distinction between facts and values. And here in

the matrix of all social science, one finds no basis for this distinction which is now regarded by many as self-evident. But one can say this is of no importance to political philosophy because common-sense knowledge, common sense, is variable historically, and so there was Greek common sense, Babylonian common sense, and so on. If there is no possibility of an invariable answer, an answer for all men at all times, then political philosophy is impossible—what should happen to it is another story, but it is no longer possible. Now this view, that there is no possibility of invariable answers, is called historicism. All thought rests ultimately upon absolute presuppositions, as Comte would put it, which differ from epoch to epoch and which are not susceptible of rational criticism. As a consequence of the cooperation of positivism and historicism, political philosophy is today radically problematic. There is no longer any possibility of starting with the premises that existed surely up until about two generations ago. There is however some consolation, some kind of universal agreement, namely, as regards the possibility and the necessity of studying the history of political philosophy. Therefore we have no choice but to learn to replace for the time being, as it were, political philosophy by its history.

The study of the history must be done properly, open-mindedly, namely, open-minded to the possibility of political philosophy and not merely closed to it, as is the case in most approaches. Now we turn therefore to the study of the history of political philosophy, and here we observe that the primary issue is the quarrel of the ancients and moderns. Political philosophy emerged in Greece. Socrates appears to be the founder, and this led to the kind of political philosophy we call classical, which includes medieval to the extent we can call it medieval political philosophy and not theology. The break with this tradition occurred in modern times, most vividly in Hobbes, but if you dig a little bit you come across Machiavelli, a man who prepared the great changes effected by Hobbes. The theme of the history of political philosophy is to understand this fundamental difference between ancient and modern—the quarrel.

Now then we discussed briefly the grounds on which Machiavelli, Hobbes, and their successors turned against practical political philosophy. And we discussed then the characteristics of classical political philosophy generally, and we turned then to Aristotle's *Politics* to acquire a more concrete understanding of<sup>1</sup> what political philosophy originally meant. We observed that in Aristotle's *Politics* there is a twofold beginning, in the beginnings of Books 1 and 3, and this twofold beginning has substantial reasons. The *Politics* begins with the discussion of the polis, the city, and its relation to the household or family. The family needs the polis and, it is argued by Aristotle against Plato, the polis needs the family, the household. The subject in Book 3 is not the polis but the *politeia*, a term which we translate by "regime." And we saw from the beginning of the Third Book that it is the *politeia*, the regime, and not the polis which is the theme of Aristotle's *Politics*. The difference between the discussion in Book 1 and that in Book 3 is simply stated as follows: in the First Book the parts of the city, the most comprehensive association, appear to be the smaller associations, among which the family is most important; but in Book 3, the parts of the city appear to be not any association, but the citizens. We will see immediately what this means.

The theme becomes the regime in contradistinction to the city. This Greek word *politeia* is ordinarily translated by the term “constitution.” I gave reasons why I think “regime” is a better translation. Now what is the issue of the *politeia*? It is the political issue, meaning the divisive issue. That there should be families is not a political issue—only some crackpots suggest from time to time the abolition of the family. But the regime is always actually or potentially a political issue. Whether or not there should be a political association is not a political thought, but the regime necessarily is. When Lasswell defines the subject matter of political science as who gets what, when, one has to say: Yes, one can say that provisionally, but who gets what, when, depends on who has the power and to what degree or extent, and that is a question of the regime.<sup>1</sup> Obviously, in a feudal monarchy other people get what and when very differently from what they would get in a democracy. So the question of power, as it is ordinarily called, is more precisely stated [as] the question of the *form* of power: the question of the regime.

It is immediately intelligible today from the Cold War, with which we are all more or less familiar, that the issue is of course not this country and Russia, but the difference of regimes, liberal democracy and communism. I do not deny that<sup>2</sup> between these two enormous territorial areas, one located in Eurasia and one located in this hemisphere,<sup>3</sup> there might be all kinds of tensions even if they had the same regime. But as it is, the conflict as it actually exists is not understandable without taking into account the difference of regimes. The Cold War shows us directly that Aristotle’s question regarding the regime is the question guiding present-day political life, and to some extent even academic political science. For an important part of that, as you know, is comparative government. But what is comparative government? Fundamentally, comparison of the various regimes or, in another respect, a discussion of the “isms”: the “isms” are the justifications of the various regimes. This is quite different from the situation of political science in the nineteenth century, where it could simply be said [that] the subject matter of political science is the state, which is not in itself divisive. By virtue of the fact that civil wars played, and play, such a tremendous role in the twentieth century, whereas they played a much smaller role in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this explains again why we understand Aristotle and Aristotle’s *Politics* in a peculiar light, because we are again in the grip of a radical political crisis.

It is a crisis which was not visible in the nineteenth century for a variety of reasons, the most striking one being belief in progress: the certainty that the most desirable regime, that of maximum freedom and equality, was bound to win. That is no longer such a certainty and therefore we have to dig somewhat more deeply. Russia or, for that matter, Upper Volta, is a theme for geography and history, or sociology, but the regimes of these countries are the themes of political science. So we see then that what Aristotle regards—and he more emphatically and clearly than any other political writers—as the theme of political science, the regime, is evidently still the theme for us. The fundamental problem is identical, but when one speaks of fundamental and invariable problems one must not assume that they are accessible equally to all times. There are times when the fundamental problems are covered over, perhaps these are the happiest times. But they are also, precisely because they are happy,<sup>4</sup> an inducement to falling asleep. And

<sup>1</sup> See Harold Lasswell, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1936).

therefore, to the extent to which we are theoretical men, men of science, we must not be concerned primarily with the happiness of the age in which we live, but rather with the opportunity or necessity it imposes upon itself to think about the fundamental issues.

Now we turn, then, to Aristotle's discussion of this key subject in the Third Book. We have read and discussed the very first lines of the Third Book. You have the Barker translation. In the first sentence of the Third Book, Aristotle makes it quite clear that we are interested in the polis only to the extent that we are interested in the *politeia*, the regime. Here there arises a question: because we are interested in the *politeia*, we must know what the polis is. Now what does Aristotle mean by raising this question again? He goes on as follows. Is there anyone who could sit and read to the class these passages? Mr. Reinken, who does this excellently, isn't here. Is there anyone who has taken lessons in elocution? Well, then I will simply dictate: Mr. Bruell, sit down and bring your Barker with you. At the second sentence. To repeat, before we hear Mr. Bruell, the question is: Why must we be concerned with what the polis is? After all, we have heard it before.

**Mr. Bruell:** "What is the nature of the polis?"<sup>ii</sup> In the first place, the nature of the "polis," or city, is at present a disputed question—

**LS:** No, wait. "For now they are engaged in controversy. Some say the polis has done the actions, and others say, not the polis, but the oligarchy, or the tyrant."<sup>iii</sup> Is this intelligible? Think of what happened in Russia after the communist revolution: the debts. Not the polis has done it, not the Russian people, but this clique. Who is speaking here? Who makes this argument? Obviously not an adherent of the tyrant, nor of the oligarchy. The speaker is a democrat. What does he imply? Democracy, oligarchy, and tyranny are of course examples of regimes. If there is no democracy, if the people do not rule, there is no polis. The polis has been destroyed for the time being. "Forms of government," we say, which is tolerable as a phrase, but "regime" is clearer, I think you will see for certain reasons. There is a work of Alexander Pope: "Our forms of government let fools contest/Whichever is best administered, is best."<sup>iv</sup> This much we can discern now: that is not Aristotelian. There are regimes which cannot be well-administered, because nothing would be improved if they were. If a tyrant administers his tyranny well, that might be worse for his subjects than if he were very inefficient. Now what is the next argument he uses?

**Mr. Bruell:** "In the second place, all the activity of the statesman and the lawgiver is obviously concerned with the state—"

**LS:** "With the city. And the regime is some form of order operational"—let us say "of the inhabitants of the city."<sup>v</sup>

<sup>ii</sup> Here Barker interpolates "[There are three reasons for so doing]," that is, for beginning the present inquiry about the polis with the question just raised.

<sup>iii</sup> *Politics* III.1274b33-36.

<sup>iv</sup> From Pope's *Essay on Man*, Epistle 3, ll. 303 ff. Pope has "For forms," not "Our forms."

<sup>v</sup> *Politics* III.1274b36-38.

That is the first definition we get. You see, it is an order of the inhabitants of the city. Of the inhabitants of the city—he doesn't say "of the citizens." Why? Because one depends already on the regime or he is not a citizen, and this precisely is the divisive issue: who is or is not a citizen. If there are various degrees of citizenship, full and not so full—this of course, as we know from every daily newspaper, is today an issue, from what they say about the goings-on in Alabama and other places.<sup>vi</sup> The city consists on the one hand of households, and on the other of citizens. The formal issue is non-divisive. It is politically neutral, we can say: there is no difference between democrats and oligarchs or tyrants about the fact that there should be families. But the question of who is or is not a citizen is fundamentally controversial. The political *par excellence*—this one cannot emphasize strongly enough—is what is divisive. The reason is this. There is no city without some order, without a form. The inhabitants are the matter, to use Aristotelian language. The order gives the city its character. When we speak of the state and forms of the state, we obscure that fact. The question then for Aristotle, as it appears immediately, is: Who is a citizen? Because we know this much: that who is or is not a citizen differs from regime to regime. Now Aristotle gives a definition of a citizen which is this: he is a citizen who participates in judging and in ruling. "Ruling" means here "giving commands." But Aristotle says this definition which suggests itself so naturally, so easily, applies primarily to the citizen in a democracy. But why does he come up first with the democratic definition of a citizen? I would say this is not an accident, just as it is not an accident that political philosophy emerged in democratic Athens. Democracy, debate, public debate—there is some connection between that, as we all know, and political philosophy.

But still, the definition, being tailored to democracy, is for this reason too special. We need a generalized version. And then Aristotle says [that] a citizen is a man who participates in unlimited ruling, literally translated. What does he mean by that? There is no limit in two respects: no limit regarding time—a citizen is a lifelong participant in ruling—and no limitation regarding subject matter. A general has his rule limited to war, a treasurer has rule limited to fiscal matters, but there is some man or body of men, as someone said later on, who must have unlimited rule. We will soon see the difference.

The rule is unlimited regarding time. The rule of the citizen is not on the basis of any election as, say, a president may be—that is a kind of delegated rule. What Aristotle says here must remind every one of you, I think, of a concept which has become very powerful in modern times. How would this be called, what Aristotle calls here unlimited rule, in modern times? We find in the early definitions of rule in modern times, and especially in Hobbes, exactly this unlimitedness. The thing which is in common is this: there are always men who rule in their own right and not by delegation. Since they rule in their own right there is not necessarily any limitation regarding the [inaudible]. It is also implied there is no possibility of appeal from their decision to any higher authority. Now what is the difference between the modern doctrine of sovereignty and the Aristotelian doctrine? If you want to simply arrive at an answer which cannot be altogether wrong, you may read the classic statement in Hobbes, especially in *Leviathan*, chapter 18. We

<sup>vi</sup> Strauss is referring to the Civil Rights Movement.

would see then immediately that Hobbean doctrine—the same is true also of [inaudible]—is a legal doctrine: What are the rights which the sovereign has?

Aristotle's doctrine can negatively be described as not being a legal doctrine, and this has grave implications. Let us turn to 1275b17-21.

**Mr. Bruell:** “But our definition of citizenship<sup>vii</sup> can be amended. We have to note that in constitutions other than the democratic, members of the assembly and the courts do not hold that office for an indeterminate period. They hold it for a limited term; and it is to persons with such a tenure (whether they be many or few) that the citizen's function of deliberating and judging (whether on all issues or only a few) is assigned in these constitutions.”<sup>viii</sup>

In other words, the specifically democratic institutions are the jury and the assembly. They would not exist in the same way in an oligarchy. And yet there is citizenship there, obviously: these men have perhaps *the* political power. There must be a definition of the citizen applicable to them as well as to the democratic citizen.

**Mr. Bruell:**

The nature of citizenship in general emerges clearly from these considerations; and our final definitions will accordingly be: (1) “he who enjoys the right of sharing in deliberative or judicial office<sup>ix</sup> attains thereby the status of a citizen of his state,” and (2) “a polis, in its simplest terms, is a body of such persons adequate in number for achieving a self-sufficient existence.”<sup>x</sup>

**LS:** “Office” is of course a slightly misleading translation because the word is *archē*, which is simply ruling, having the rule, having the initiative. “He who has the privilege to participate in deliberative and judging ruling,” meaning, giving commands. Obviously a judge gives commands, but the deliberator also gives commands because deliberation necessarily issues, or should issue, in a decision—say, a law, declaration of war, or whatever it may be—and this is a command given to others. So in other words, in every society there are some men, more or less, from whom all power of commanding stems, and in such a way that their power is not a delegated power. The individual citizen may be elected to a magistracy and that of course is a delegated power, but the power he has as member of a sovereign body is not a delegated power. The sovereign, as we say in modern language, cannot be called to account. So we know now what a citizen is: men who participate in three functions above all—the deliberative, which is the same as what we would call today decision making (it is quite interesting that it is not called decision making by Aristotle, but deliberation). When you speak of decisionmaking you may

<sup>vii</sup> Here Barker adds an interpolation in reference to difficulties involved with the task of defining the citizen: “[may still be maintained, in spite of these difficulties, since it].”

<sup>viii</sup> *Politics* III.1275b13-17. Note: There is no indication in the transcript whether it is Strauss or the student who reads this passage. Here and in what follows, where the transcript is unclear, it will always be assumed that passages from the *Politics* are read out by the student.

<sup>ix</sup> Barker interpolates “[for any period, fixed or unfixed].”

<sup>x</sup> III.1275b17-21.

forget that the decision is meant to be the outcome of deliberation. When you speak of deliberation, this danger is obviated. Mr. Levy?

**Mr. Levy:** Mr. Strauss, I'm sorry, but I don't see the difference between Aristotle's first definition, the one that belongs with democracy, and his second definition, the one that's supposed to be general. What would the difference be?

**LS:** Now let me see this wording, the precise wording. "To participate in judgment and in ruling."

**Mr. Levy:** Would that be from election, meaning "elected"?

**LS:** No, ruling is much larger. You must not forget that there are also what we now call executives, say, a general, and even down to a simple policeman. They also have the right of command. But in this case it is perfectly clear that these rights are all delegated powers. And what we are concerned with is the non-delegated powers, the original powers.

**Mr. Levy:** Wouldn't that rather be a right of electing?

**LS:** Electing magistrates? Sure, but Aristotle sees it concentrated, not in this elective power, but in the deliberative and judging power.

**Mr. Levy:** The word used for judging in the first definition—could that possibly be translated "electing" instead of "judging"?

**LS:** No. It could be stretched, but I don't think it means that. Later on he has long discussions about the order of rank between the various functions which the ruling body has. But the deliberative one, which includes the legislative, is always the most important. Yes?

**Student:** At the end of the second definition, he said "the city is a body of such citizens, large enough to be self-sufficient." But according to the second definition, in a tyranny or an oligarchy you would only have one or a few citizens.

**LS:** Not only one or a few, that would be very extreme.

**Student:** Well, in a tyranny the only person who would rule in his own right would be the tyrant.

**LS:** Yes, but the question is whether that can be called a regime, and we will come to that later. The question would be the absolute monarchy, a subject so interesting Aristotle devotes to it the second part of Book 3. Aristotle proceeds step by step. He starts from what everyone knows from experience—in this case, in Athens, in a democracy. Then he sees that this is not sufficient because there are regimes other than a democracy, [and] therefore this great enlargement is still not broad enough. In what sense you can speak of

citizens in an absolute monarchy is difficult to say. You know, it was not so very long ago that in a great modern democracy called Great Britain there were no citizens but subjects. It happened, I think in the last generation, that they became citizens. Now this was more a quaint antiquarianism of the British, I think, than anything of importance politically, but it indicates that for a long time there were no citizens. In an absolute monarchy there is no one who participates by his own right in judging and deliberating. If so, the king has appointed him.

Now let us read the next section, because<sup>5</sup> this is a relatively theoretical level on which we speak, but we must never forget the simple level, of which he speaks immediately<sup>6</sup> [following].

**Mr. Bruell:** “For practical purposes—”

**LS:** more literally, that is “*for use*”

**Mr. Bruell:** “it is usual to define a citizen as ‘one born of citizen parents on both sides,’ and not on the father’s or mother’s side only; but sometimes this requirement is carried still further back, to the length of two, three, or more stages of ancestry.”

**LS:** So in other words, sometimes also the grandparents must have been citizens, and it can go on and on.

**Mr. Bruell:**

This popular and facile definition has induced some thinkers to raise the question, “How did the citizen of the third or fourth stage of ancestry himself come to be a citizen?” Gorgias of Leontini—perhaps partly from a sense of this difficulty and partly in irony—said, “As mortars are things which are made by the craftsmen who are mortar-makers, so Larissaeans are persons who are made by the ‘craftsmen’ who are Larissaeans-makers.”

**LS:** Perhaps he means here at the same time the magistrates of Larissa.

**Mr. Bruell:** “But<sup>xi</sup> the matter is really simple. If, in their day, they enjoyed constitutional rights in the sense of our own definition,<sup>xii</sup> they were certainly citizens.”

**LS:** The main point is, if they participated in ruling and in judging, then they are citizens, regardless of whether their parents were. Yes?

<sup>xi</sup> Barker inserts here this interpolation: “[there is no reason to raise any difficulty about the title of the earlier citizens].”

<sup>xii</sup> An interpolation appears here in Barker: “[i.e. the right of sharing in judicial or deliberative office].”



**Mr. Bruell:** “It is obviously impossible to apply the requirement of descent from a citizen father or a citizen mother to those who were the first inhabitants or original founders of a state.”<sup>xiii</sup>

**LS:** Do you see the absurdity which follows from the political definition which Aristotle calls “political and crude”? Everything political is necessarily crude, and therefore Aristotle is compelled, in his deeper discussion, to go beyond that. But for the crude view, a citizen is a descendant of another citizen, yet who is a citizen in an oligarchy differs from the citizen in a liberal democracy. For the notion of what this means, to be a good citizen, differs profoundly. The good citizen is relative to the regime. But this, Aristotle points out, does not change a fundamental non-relativism: there is a kind of goodness which has no relativity to the regime, and that is the goodness of man as man. By a good man, thoughtful, unbiased people mean everywhere the same: a just man, a moderate man, brave, and the other virtues. And therefore the good man could possibly act as a standard, allowing us to distinguish between preferable and less preferable regimes. Aristotle does not go into this at this point. He only stresses this identity of the good man compared with the variability of the good citizen, and he gives us an inkling of a solution by saying that the good man and the good citizen coincide only in one case, namely, in the citizen of the best regime when he is exercising a ruling function because then all the virtues which he has in the highest form come into play when he is politically active.

After these remarks, Aristotle turns now to an explicit discussion of the various regimes. He has given us an indication of why the questions of regime are the most important questions, and he has always understood without any proof because everyone knows it, that there is a variety of regimes. But now it becomes necessary for him to have a comprehensive notion of these varieties. After all, we must know how many and what kind these regimes are and how they differ from each other. Aristotle determines the variety of regimes on the basis of two considerations. First, what is the purpose of the city? And second, how many kinds of rule over men<sup>7</sup> exist? The purpose of the city is necessary to consider, because otherwise we will have no criterion for distinguishing between good and bad regimes or between better and worse. That regime is better which is more in accordance with the purpose of the city, and this question of better and worse regimes leads of course eventually to the question of the best regime, as I believe I do not have to make clear.

Now what are these purposes for which men live in civil society? There are three. First, man is by nature a political animal. This is here understood in a strict sense. Men love living together as such, independent of considerations of benefits, advantages. I think we can always check that to some extent: only in certain extreme situations would we wish to live in complete solitude and never to see another human being. Ordinarily we like human company. The second purpose is the common good, and the common good is to live nobly. Without proving it here, Aristotle assumes that living nobly is essentially living together. Living nobly means the practice of the virtues, and the practice of the virtues requires, not necessarily in all cases of all virtues but generally speaking, living

<sup>xiii</sup> *Politics* III.1275b22-34.

together. But there is also a third purpose which he mentions, and that is mere life, in a word, mere survival. This passage is of some interest to a broader question . . .

**Mr. Bruell:**

The good life is the chief end, both for the community as a whole and for each of us individually. But men also come together, and form and maintain political associations, merely for the sake of life; for perhaps there is some element of the good even in the simple act of living, so long as the evils of existence do not preponderate too heavily. It is an evident fact that most men cling hard enough to life to be willing to endure a good deal of suffering, which implies that life has in it a sort of healthy happiness and a natural sweetness.<sup>xiv</sup>

**LS:** So that is very interesting, that people enter civil society for the sake of mere life, not for the good life. Does this remind you of the argument of another political philosopher?

**Student:** Rousseau.

**LS:** No . . .

**Student:** Hobbes.

**LS:** Yes, the teacher of self-preservation as best. You are quite right about Rousseau, but this is on a somewhat deeper level than I would like to go at this point. So what a difference! What does Hobbes say about our clinging to life? Does he speak of a natural sweetness of life? No! The terror of death. That is so characteristic of Hobbes, that he never speaks of the natural sweetness which Achilles, for example, when he is in the netherworld, describes: he says it is better to be a day-laborer and slave on earth than a king in Hades.<sup>xv</sup> This is quite remarkable. To make this very clear: it is quite necessary for Hobbes to have this teaching. According to Hobbes, there is no *summum bonum*, no highest good, whereas Aristotle says: Of course there is a highest good. But Hobbes teaches that on the other hand there is a *summum malum*, a highest evil (a very paradoxical expression). Of course that is death. Here is one beautiful illustration of what happened. And don't think that it is only Hobbes, because what Locke teaches about pleasure and pain is in a milder form of expression, Locke being a much less nasty and naughty man than Hobbes was, [but] the same thing, fundamentally.

What was mentioned with Rousseau a moment ago is correct. It is one of the points where Rousseau returns in a way to the ancients against Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau's argument being that self-preservation would not have this fundamental importance if life itself did not have this natural sweetness. He does not use exactly the same words, but almost: he speaks of the sentiment of existence, which is simply pleasant, and which is the deepest thing in man.

<sup>xiv</sup> *Politics* III.1278b23-30. For "sweetness" Barker has "quality of pleasure"; the substitution suggests that Strauss may be reading.

<sup>xv</sup> *Odyssey* 11.489-91.

But let us return to Aristotle. We have seen the three reasons [or] grounds [for] why man enters society. Now we must consider: How many kinds of rule over men are there? Aristotle gives here three. The rule of the master over the slave: in Greek, *despotikē*, from which “despot” is misderived. (Despotism and tyranny have totally different meanings in the classical tradition, and the identification of tyranny and despotism which has taken place in the eighteenth century is a minor historical question. The despot means simply the rule of master over slave and of course, if the man is a natural slave, there is nothing wrong with that according to Aristotle.) Then there is economic rule: rule within the household, that is, which as rule over slaves is fundamentally in the interest of the master. I mean, that this poor fellow is prevented from mischief, from harming himself by his extreme stupidity, is accidental: the main point is, the master gets someone who shaves him and takes care of a few other things which are below his dignity. But the rule of a husband over his wife or a father over his children is primarily in the interests of the ruled. Then there is a third kind of rule, which is political rule, where there is ruling and being ruled in turn. Clearly, the wife is not supposed to rule over the husband the next day, and even less so the children, but in political rule there is such a thing, the assumption being that the political community is a community of free and equal men. (There may be unfree and unequal ones outside.) This is indeed for the benefit of the ruled. That is to say, if<sup>8</sup> President Johnson is still ruling, it is understood that he will rule for the benefit of the U.S. Of course it is also understood that is for the benefit of President Johnson, because he is after all a citizen of the U.S. Aristotle has a nice comparison:<sup>9</sup> if someone, a gymnastic trainer who trains his pupils in the interest of the pupils, [so] that they should become fit bodies, should himself join in the training by showing the motions which they make, his own body becomes fitter: accidentally it is in the interest of the trainer, and in this case of President Johnson. We can say that political rule is rule for the common good.

Now from these characterizations of rule it follows that despotic rule, the rule of master over slave, is always against the character of the political association. But the two others, economic rule (rule of the father) and political rule proper, are in themselves possibly good. The argument leads up to a simple schema which you must learn by heart if you do not know it. It is very simple, but it turns up again and again and you need it to see how it is modified by other thinkers. [LS writes on the blackboard] There is the good and the bad—first distinction. The other is the number of rulers.

One: The good ruler is *kingship*; the bad ruler is *tyranny*.

Few: Good rule of few, *aristocracy*; bad rule of few, *oligarchy*.

Many: Good rule of many, he calls *polity* (with the same word, “*politeia*,” which is used for regime in general),<sup>10</sup> the bad rule of many<sup>11</sup> is *democracy*, according to Aristotle.

Nothing is here omitted. There are of course mixed forms. This division has been made by Plato in his *Statesman* before, though there is one difference and that is that Plato does not make a distinction between a good and bad democracy, because democracy is a weak regime and therefore it cannot be too much bad and too much good either way.<sup>xvi</sup>

<sup>xvi</sup> *Statesman* 291c-292a, 302c-303b.

But this is of course a merely external schema and in itself not quite intelligible, because it is this kind of form. And Aristotle has proof for that because he gives a long discussion which we cannot read now on the following consideration:<sup>12</sup> by oligarchy is understood the rule of the rich, though it is not stated here; similarly, by democracy everyone means the rule of the poor. No one denies that this is the most common problem, especially during the Peloponnesian War. But much beyond that, every city has two kinds of men—the most massively important distinction—the rich and the poor. Machiavelli says the same thing many years later and even today we can still recognize it. “Poor,” by the way, never means beggars but people who have to earn their living, whereas the rich are people who do not have to work. I think we can even today make that distinction. So the practical standpoint is not this schema, although we need this to make sure lest anything has been forgotten, the practical standpoint is from the difference between democracy and oligarchy, the rule of the rich and the rule of the poor. Aristotle has a very amusing discussion: Why should there not be a regime in which the few are poor and the many are rich? [It is] theoretically possible but not practical, to say the least.

But this much is clear: one form is defective because wealth is not the most important consideration for rule, nor freedom, because a freeborn citizen may be very stupid and very wicked, just as a rich citizen may be very stupid and very wicked. So we wonder whether there is not a kind of mixture of the two which might be superior. Aristotle says there is.<sup>13</sup> He first speaks of the *politeia*, the regime, in which all men able to serve as heavy-armed infantrymen are citizens. This means of course, in a word, property qualifications.<sup>14</sup> The arms of a light-armed soldier are much less expensive than heavy armor, therefore they are more or less substantial citizens. Now you will see the way in which Aristotle argues this out. The principle is to be or [to] have been a heavily-armed soldier, that is to say, not mere wealth or mere freedom but the patriotic view which sees that it is the same fatherland despite the changes in regime. From this it follows that he takes a patriotic view of the good citizen. A good citizen is the man who continues to serve his country despite all changes of regime. You know, in recent times there was some controversy in France [about] whether those magistrates who served under Vichy loyally, and then under de Gaulle, and so forth—whether they are not, after all is said and done, better citizens, better Frenchmen, than those who were loyal to one particular regime.<sup>xvii</sup>

The democrats and oligarchs are those whom we call partisans; the patriots are not partisans, and the partisan is to that extent not a patriot because he regards something as more important than the fatherland.<sup>15</sup> The partisans are those who adhere to a particular regime, who say there is no polis if the right kind of regime is not established. Now people do not necessarily say, as in our case:<sup>16</sup> The city didn't do it. the tyrant did it. In our time, I believe the oligarchs would say: The country is going to pieces. Well, the country, if it is going to pieces, is no longer in existence, and its final disappearance will follow. This we call the partisan view. And clearly the partisans will call the patriots

<sup>xvii</sup> Strauss is referring here and in the next paragraph to officials who served under the collaborationist government after the French defeat and occupation by Nazi Germany during World War II, and later the restored republic after liberation.

turncoats: because they served the Third Republic, they served Vichy, they were turncoats.

There was a man somehow connected with Athens, Theramenes, who did exactly this—whether from purity of heart or less pure motives is of course impossible to discern—but he was called a turncoat, whereas people who admired him said: No, he is the good citizen, he put a higher value on Athens, the permanent substance, than the superficial regime.<sup>xviii</sup> Do you see how important that issue is, and how it undercuts all other political discussions? And only in very happy times, when a regime is firmly established and there are no considerable clouds on the political horizon, does this question not arise.

We see it in the following manner. People like Xenophon—and especially Xenophon, who fought in the Peloponnesian War on the Spartan side, i.e., on the wrong side, against his father—in the early nineteenth century, when political historians influenced by the French Revolution went over these old facts, they thought what Xenophon had done was terrible. He fought against his own country! Traitor. This was the first time that Xenophon's wreath was taken off his head, on this ground. If this historian, Niebuhr was his name, had lived a hundred fifty years he would have seen that there were people born in Germany who fought against Hitler's German army, and we do not wish to say they were morally inferior people.<sup>xix</sup> Only in simple and quiet times do such questions not come up. Needless to say, that is legally insoluble because every law will identify itself with some type of regime, but not all legally insoluble questions are for this reason nonexistent questions.

So the political question as Aristotle presents it is this: What makes a city the same city? What makes a country the same country? The patriots are wrong and the partisans are wrong. The patriots say: There is always the same country. The partisans say: Only if that regime we favor is established, the city is what makes the country. Aristotle says: Since the regime is able to change from an oligarchy to a democracy, the city is a place by nature. But to judge one city by another city—this is the apparently paradoxical character of Aristotle's teaching. Or you might say Aristotle is very precise and follows what is said in our common way of speaking, [the] sensible judgment. Let us now read further.

### Mr. Bruell:

Still assuming a single population inhabiting a single territory, shall we say that the state retains its identity as long as the stock of its inhabitants remains the same (although the old members are always dying and new members are always being

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<sup>xviii</sup> Theramenes was a fifth-century Athenian politician who was involved in both the oligarchic coup of 411 and the regime of the Thirty Tyrants established under Spartan auspices after Athenian defeat in 404. In both cases he eventually clashed with the more extremist elements within the government, in the latter case fatally. The controversy surrounding his legacy is attested at Aristotle, *Constitution of the Athenians* 28.5.

<sup>xix</sup> See Barthold Georg Niebuhr, *Lectures on Ancient History*, trans. L. Schmitz, vol. 2 (London: Taylor, Walton, and Maberly, 1852), 36.

born)?<sup>xx</sup> Or must we take a different view, and say that while the population remains the same, for the reason already mentioned,<sup>xxi</sup> the city may none the less change?<sup>xxii</sup>

If a polis is a form of association, and if this form of association is an association of citizens in a polity or constitution, it would seem to follow inevitably that when the constitution suffers a change in kind, and becomes a different constitution, the polis also will cease to be the same polis, and will change its identity. We may cite an analogy from the drama. We say that a chorus which appears at one time as a comic and at another as a tragic chorus is not continuously the same, but alters its identity—and this in spite of the fact that the members often remain the same. What is true of a chorus is also true of every other form of association, and of all other compounds generally. If the scheme of composition is different, the compound becomes a different compound. A harmony composed of the same notes will be a different harmony according as the “mode”<sup>xxiii</sup> is Dorian or Phrygian. If this is the case, it is obvious that the criterion to which we must chiefly look in determining the identity of the state is the criterion of the constitution.<sup>xxiv</sup>

LS: Now this seems a very strange example, but it makes everything quite clear. You have the chorus serving in a tragedy, and then the same chorus serving in a comedy. It is a different chorus although they are the same individuals because the principle of composition and the purpose for which they are composed differs radically. Aristotle says this helps in understanding what constitutes the unity of the city above all. You see here, when you read especially the last sentence, Aristotle does not deny the continuity which we imply when we speak of the history of the British constitution from the time of Alfred the Great up to Elizabeth II, but he says it is the continuity of the *matter*: the English people generate other Englishmen. Furthermore, he does not say the sameness of the city depends only on the regime. That would be plainly absurd, because if this were so, then all democracies would be a single regime. There wouldn’t be *n* democracies. Through change of regimes, the city becomes another city [though] not simply; it also becomes some other things,<sup>xxv</sup> for example, if all moved out and went to a new land, it would also be another city. But through change of regimes the city becomes another city in the most important respect, for it becomes a different regime regarding its end, the purpose to which it is dedicated. That is the most important consideration. No change is as important as the change from virtue to vice, or the reverse. What change can be compared to that in significance? It is of course not a different city in every respect, for example, not regarding treaty obligations, the difference with which he started. Aristotle does not give

<sup>xx</sup> The reader has omitted the words “and shall we thus apply to the state the analogy of rivers and fountains, to which we ascribe a constant identity in spite of the fact that part of their water is always flowing in and part always flowing out?”

<sup>xxi</sup> Barker interpolates “[i.e. that the stock of the inhabitants continues to be the same].”

<sup>xxii</sup> In Barker the next paragraph begins with the interpolation “[The latter view carries the day.]”

<sup>xxiii</sup> Here Barker interpolates “[or scheme of its composition].”

<sup>xxiv</sup> *Politics* III.1276a34-b11.

<sup>xxv</sup> “it also becomes some other things”: suggest “it also depends on some other things”

the answer explicitly here, but it is obvious, for the very same reason that Aristotle was the same man. Since the tyrant made the obligation for the benefit of the city—after all, he might say: I want to adorn my capital, and the citizens like these beautiful streets and buildings—but if he incurred the debts in order to maintain a bodyguard which maltreated the citizens, then of course: “Let these foreign bastards who gave him the money see how they can get it.”

Now we in our discussions today come across this question in a very simple thing, that is, the question of loyalty. What does loyalty mean? “To the United States” is not enough. A Communist could say: “I am loyal to the people of the United States. I want the best for them, and for this reason, I wish to abolish the liberal democracy.” Loyalty simply is loyalty to the established regime as characterized by the established regime. This question is illustrated in another manner by the question of citizenship. If we consider again the regime in which all men able to serve as heavy-armed infantrymen are citizens, it follows that the consideration of virtue comes in. But military virtue, that of the citizen soldier, while highly respectable, is not the complete virtue. And therefore we can visualize a still higher regime between democracy and oligarchy having the advantages of both but avoiding their disadvantage: and that is the rule of the virtuous men simply, and this is aristocracy. So this is more “quote realistic unquote,” at least as revealing Aristotle’s intention, than the other one.

This—that the mean, the middle, is higher than the extreme—is characteristic of the *Ethics* also. From a simple point of view, one doesn’t see from our modern point of view why what is in the middle should be higher than the extremes, the reason being that the mean is not merely the arithmetic average but it has a different principle than the extremes: the principle of moderation, for example. Aristotle also says, without contradicting himself (and this had an effect of sorts in the last election), that the mean of any virtue compared to the two opposing vices is in a sense also an extreme—especially [LS writes on the blackboard] because it stands out. Virtue is an excellence: compared with the average, it is an extreme. This landed somehow in the acceptance speech of Senator Goldwater and gave people who didn’t know Aristotle an occasion to be surprised.<sup>xxvi</sup> Yes?

**Student:** In what sense is the aristocracy unlike the oligarchy?

**LS:** Because it avoids the mere principle of wealth and the mere principle of freedom. In other words, they must be between the two, while not deprived of either. But their title derives ultimately not from that great wealth on which the oligarchy relies, but from being a model for activity.

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<sup>xxvi</sup> A reference to the notorious line in Barry Goldwater’s speech at the Republican convention in July 1964: “Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice . . . moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue.” Goldwater was a U.S. Senator from Arizona and the Republican party nominee for President in the 1964 election. It may be noted that an older student of Strauss, Harry V. Jaffa, is commonly credited with inserting this line (adapted from Cicero) into Goldwater’s speech.

**Student:** In other words, the very fact that virtue is held to be an extreme seems to make aristocracy *more* than simply *in deed*, because it would be in deed only to the extent that virtue is dependent upon having to be upheld.

**LS:** But the point is this—[and] Aristotle does not make this in vain: you cannot understand virtue unless you see that it is essentially opposed to two extremes. For example, take the simple case of liberality. If you understand liberality as a virtue only in opposition to profligacy, you do not understand it. You must also see it in relation to, in opposition to, extreme stinginess. I mean, proceeding empirically, you see that. You say: A liberal man, a free spender. But is all free spending virtuous? Then you see some cases of wholly irresponsible playboys, and you say: No, there is also something in the middle. But the deeper reason why it is in the middle is not merely a statistical average, but because it has a higher principle than the principle of reasonableness, a consideration which is absent from the extremes. Yes, Mr. Wyatt?

**Mr. Wyatt:** In the other cases, the extremes are in some way intentional. Here it doesn't seem in any way that they are, or that aristocracy, while it may be a mean between extremes, is in any way at all a derivative from good influence. Whereas in the case of liberality the beginning is . . .

**LS:** Well, you see, the discussion hitherto is of course provisional and not concrete enough. Look at it this way. What is virtue as Aristotle understands it, especially in the political context? Moral virtue as it is described in the *Ethics* requires equipment, *ektos* in Greek. Now what does this mean in plain English? You must have some money. For example, how can your liberality be visible if you do not have something to spare? You see, Aristotle is in this respect quite tough. He knows that among very poor people there can also be the virtues but they are immanifest, they don't strike you. As an example of a liberal man, you would not, unless you are a kind of sophisticated novelist, give an example of two inmates of Skid Row. Aristotle does not doubt there is liberality also in Skid Row, but we would not seek our examples there just as we would not seek our examples of martial prowess in homes for people older than ninety. So there is a certain equipment needed, and therefore aristocracy requires some wealth. And similarly, he must be a free man, because he wouldn't have a ghost of a chance to be recognized as a ruler if he were a slave or even a freedman.

**Student:** Is there something<sup>17</sup> besides the mere fact that they are prerequisites, I mean, is there any common characteristic that makes . . .

**LS:** No, only this, that the matter with which they deal enters into the higher levels, the matter of wealth, and the other, of freedom. In the lower cases, the matter is not transfigured from a higher point of view, and they remain therefore in simple opposition. Here are the merely free men; here are those who are, in addition, also rich. And both considerations are not sufficient. What the so-called realistic men try to do is of course to get rid of virtue. The word "virtue" has become so ridiculous that it is a kind of snobbery, I believe, to use it, at least in certain circles. But why not forget about it and speak only of the rich and the poor or, with Mr. Lasswell, who gets what and when? The trouble is that



even if you want to be completely down to earth, you have to bring in, in a strictly subservient fashion, the virtues. I mean, however down to earth you may be, you would prefer in a pinch to be judged by a just jury, by a just judge, and you would like to have civil servants perfectly immune to bribes on the part of these goof-pill sellers—is this the proper expression? [laughter]—and you know that. Even Lasswell has to bring in such concepts as integrity and other considerations. That the virtues are needed in a subservient, instrumental fashion if society is not to go to pieces is not too difficult to prove, and I believe it would be readily admitted.

The key question, then is this: Can virtue be understood as merely instrumental? That is the divisive<sup>xxvii</sup> issue on the theoretical plane. If virtue is only a means for the well-being of civil society, then the benefit of civil society alone determines the use or nonuse of virtue. That was Machiavelli's doctrine: you are virtuous when it is good for your community, but if not—when it is bad—then you are vicious. These considerations, more nobly expressed in the form in which they were by Augustine: Is there not a difference between a gang of robbers and civil society? Because you know there is also a certain morality in a gang of robbers. They would not last for one day if there were not a certain trust that each will get his share and that if you have a contract, as I believe they call it—that someone will be transported to a safe place until the whole thing has blown over and other niceties—it will be kept. What Augustine means of course by saying that civil society differs from a gang of robbers is that it is more consistent in trying to be virtuous than a gang of robbers, who take very narrow views of the virtue which they demand.<sup>xxviii</sup> But above all, that virtue must be not merely instrumental but the purpose of civil society: this is Aristotle's view. But there is nothing wrong in starting from the lowest view and simply saying: Dog eats dog, the rich eat poor and vice versa, and let us see where we come from there. There is only group politics, no one cares for the common good, the common good is simply the outcome of power relations between the various groups. But [then] you will only be able to account for a limited range of phenomena.

In this respect, the same difficulties come out with the simplest view of citizenship as defined by birth from citizen parents, and grandparents, and so on. Carried far enough, it would follow that the first citizens, the founding fathers, were not citizens. This is the most absurd thing to imagine, that the parents of George Washington were not American citizens. But when Aristotle points to this, he uses the opportunity to make something else clear. The joke of Gorgias, the famous teacher of rhetoric, he says, is this: that “Larissa-makers” means in the first place the people who generate citizens: parents. But it has also a double meaning because in the case of naturalization, for example, there, the Larissa-makers are magistrates who naturalize the citizens. So whereas in the first place citizenship seems to be something entirely natural, as natural as generation—being generated by a human father and a human mother—in the second place we see it can be something entirely dependent on law, entirely conventional. That this view is in a sense more true becomes clear if we reflect about the fact, pointed out by Aristotle, that who is or is not a citizen depends not on nature simply but on the regime. This throws some light on the character of the city: the city is by nature, yet not simply, and this follows clearly

<sup>xxvii</sup> “divisive”: suggest “decisive”

<sup>xxviii</sup> The reference appears to be to Augustine's *City of God*, pt. 4, bk. 4 ff.

from the fact that every city must have a form, a regime, and the variety of regimes leads him to the question: Which of these regimes, if any, can be said to be natural? In the extreme case, if no regime can be said to be simply natural, then the city is as much conventional as it is natural. But there may be the possibility that there is a single regime, the only one according to nature, which would mean that the others are not natural, that they are forms of political sickness.

Now hitherto we have seen that the regime is a form of the polis. All things have their forms, their shape, their characters—horses, dogs, oak trees, and so on. When they lose their form, they cease to be. If you have ever seen a living being in a state of advanced decay, say, a rabbit, you will know what I mean. Furthermore, these forms are not changeable. A horse cannot take on the character of a dog, except in Arabian tales. But here we come to another consideration. The same city can have successively different regimes—in other words, a kind of miracle, that something which has been a cat becomes a dog. These changes of regimes are now popularly called *revolutions*. The question is: How deep do these changes go? Let us remind ourselves of the thesis of the democrats, whom we have heard: Not the polis did it, but the tyrant; while the tyrant ruled, there was no polis. The houses were there, the matter was there, the human beings, but there was not a polis, a commonwealth. But when we speak today of English constitutional history, for instance, we imply: There always was England. The same substance remained despite the changes it underwent. It was feudal, absolute monarchy, constitutional monarchy, with a kind of oligarchy, and then democracy, but the same England, the same substance, remained despite the changes: the same land, the same fatherland. One needs to spell that out, and that you still need a government instead of a computer to do that is quite interesting and seems to have something to do with the fact that man is still in a sense understood to be a rational animal.

The key point regarding the number of rulers: there is the rule of one, of few, and of many. There is not any rule of all. That has extraordinary implications. There is always the rule of a part or of a combination of parts. Such a combination is, this kind of rich may go together with that kind of poor—you can easily figure out for yourself. The rule of a combination of parts would be a mixed regime. Aristotle has referred to this already in the Second Book, when speaking of Sparta and other things. This question of the mixed regime became historically relevant for the United States, as you see from *Federalist* 10.

What I wish to discuss next time is this question: Can we learn anything from Aristotle's schema for the variety of regimes toward the understanding of modern democracy? That we can learn something in general, namely, that the concern of *regime*, and not the very vague word "power" is that which is a peculiarly political phenomenon—this I think I have shown. Because power—there is electrical power, there is the power of the chief rooster in the yard, there is that of a nasty husband over his wife, and vice versa—these are all wholly uninteresting politically. The peculiar thing is the regime. This is obviously sound and very topical, but if we turn to our more immediate task, that is connected with the question of democracy. So the point which I would like to take up next time is: Can we learn from Aristotle something about a democracy?

[end of session]

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<sup>1</sup> Deleted "how."

<sup>2</sup> Deleted "the difference."

<sup>3</sup> Deleted "that."

<sup>4</sup> Deleted "they are."

<sup>5</sup> Deleted "this shows us."

<sup>6</sup> Deleted "after."

<sup>7</sup> Deleted "do there."

<sup>8</sup> Deleted "Vice"

<sup>9</sup> Deleted "That is, as."

<sup>10</sup> Deleted "of many."

<sup>11</sup> Deleted "and here there."

<sup>12</sup> Deleted "Democracy—well."

<sup>13</sup> Deleted "You know."

<sup>14</sup> Deleted "You know."

<sup>15</sup> Deleted "The partisan says, there is no polis, if the right kind of regime is not established."

<sup>16</sup> Deleted "that."

<sup>17</sup> Deleted "behind."

**Session 13: no date**

**Leo Strauss:** [In progress]—of which Aristotle did not even dream. Think of communism and fascism. So you had to consider this question for one moment: how far Aristotle's specific analyses of regimes are relevant for our understanding of the regimes with which we are confronted today. And I limit myself to the question of democracy.

Now Aristotle defines democracy as a regime directed toward the benefit of the poor. "Poor" does not mean here what it means in President Johnson's "war against poverty";<sup>1</sup> it means those who have to earn their living. The distinction is clearly made in Aristophanes' comedy *Ploutos*, literally translated *Wealth*. Poverty as a woman appears defending poverty against the claims of wealth, and she emphasizes the fact that the poor are those who, like the farmers, have to earn their living; and the others, the beggars, are of course not even considered.

To repeat, Aristotle defines democracy as a regime directed toward the benefit of the poor and<sup>2</sup> indifferent to the common good, i.e., the good of all citizens. Now this is quite shocking to us but, on the other hand, not unintelligible. Now we have heard in modern democracies expressions like "milking the rich" through inheritance taxes and progressive income taxes. We have heard, although this may very well be apocryphal, "we tax, we tax, and we tax; we spend, we spend, and we spend; and we elect, we elect, and we elect." This is ascribed to Harry Hopkins, probably untrue.<sup>1</sup> Now we solve the difficulty by assuming that the common good, with which every decent society must be concerned, consists in the greatest happiness of the greatest number. And then of course we have the democratic implication immediately. Or to use the formula well known from the *Communist Manifesto*: a movement of the great majority on behalf of the great majority—of course, against the exploiters of the toilers.<sup>ii</sup> This is in a way a solution.

Now can this analysis of democracy as Aristotle presents it be of any relevance for a discussion of present-day democracy?<sup>3</sup> What do we understand by democracy? We do not take these extreme statements to which I referred. Let us consider Lincoln's: "government of the people, by the people, and for the people." Now what is the key point here? Government *for* the people—that goes without saying here. This is of course also true of absolute monarchy, according to its claim, or enlightened despotism—paternally taking care of the people. Government *of* the people is entirely different. It implies the ultimate sovereignty of the people, i.e., the exclusion of kingship by the grace of God. Government is not due to an act of divine grace as such, but to the people. The people may delegate government to a king, or to a king and Parliament. This view is familiar to all of you, of course, from your school days, because that is the view stated on the first

<sup>i</sup> Harry Lloyd Hopkins (1890-1946), close aide to FDR and architect of the New Deal. He is alleged to have uttered the words, "we will spend and spend, and tax and tax, and elect and elect."

<sup>ii</sup> "The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority." Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1906), 30.

page of the Declaration of Independence. In case anyone has forgotten it, I remind you of it.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government [LS: that is, the same people who originally established it] laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Now the implication of the whole attack, of the long list of grievances, is that the British king and Parliament have lost their claim to rule<sup>4</sup> because of these terrible things—quartering soldiers, and taxation without representation, and the other points—but it is of course implied that the government itself was legitimate. It became illegitimate by the tyrannical use of the power. The Declaration of Independence is perfectly compatible with constitutional monarchy in the eighteenth-century sense, or with king and Parliament. The peculiarly democratic element of Lincoln's famous statement is "government *by* the people," meaning the people governs itself . . . which it wouldn't do in a constitutional monarchy, where the king and Parliament govern. In other words, it is implied there is no government distinct from the people. The people governs itself through men of the people, who come from the people and return to it after very short tenures of office. There is no one who governs in a democracy in his own right, but only by virtue of delegation and election. In other words, the government is not a different breed from the ruled, as it would be in the case of a nobility, where they are a different breed from the commoners, [and where] there is always a difference between the government and the people; there is no self-government of the people strictly understood. To say there is no government distinct from the people is a proposition only literally true if one identifies the government with the legislative, deliberative part of the government as distinct from the executive or the magistrates, and if the legislative-deliberative part consists of the whole citizen body assembled. Is this clear? In that case you can say government of the people, self-government literally understood: no distinction between government and the people because government by laws is the deliberative part, the legislative part, and this is the people—the town meeting, for example. In contradistinction to any representatives of the people, or in contradistinction to parliamentary democracy, the Lincolnian formula draws our attention to direct democracy as the democracy par excellence.

From this it follows that modern democracy, even in Lincoln's time of course, is not truly democratic. Now this view of democracy has been attacked frequently and is still being attacked as misleading, because it is based on what people call a romantic conception of democracy in contradistinction to a realistic one. The word "romantic" can here be

understood to have precise meaning because the theorist of direct democracy was Rousseau, and Rousseau is the father of romanticism, one can say.

Now what is the meaning of this criticism of the romantic conception of democracy? A very well-known fact, that people cannot govern themselves but must have leaders. It is added, there are always actual or potential leaders around, elites, and, negatively stated, the phenomenon of electoral apathy shows how little you can count on self-government of the people in a strict sense. A very well-known representative of this view, Robert Michels, has spoken of the “iron law of oligarchy,” which means there is never a democracy.<sup>iii</sup> So always an oligarchy rules: if you have absolute monarchy there is a clique around the king because very few things can be done by the king himself, and in democracy there is also an oligarchy or, rather, a number of oligarchies competing with each other.

Now the so-called realistic concept embodies notions which were originally advanced by critics or opponents of democracy, by people who tried to show that democracy in any strict sense, self-government of the people, is impossible. While the romantic notion is based on a fantastic notion of equality, namely, that all are equally capable of being leaders, the realistic notion claims to recognize the crucial importance of inequality—for what else does the emphasis on leadership mean but the recognition of the crucial importance of inequality? There is a simple example: one of the best known radical democrats a generation ago was Henry Wallace, and he was particularly concerned with “the Common Man,” a phrase which he liked to use. And his biographer called the story of his life *An Uncommon Man*.<sup>iv</sup> So in other words, precisely if you want to have the rule of the common man, this rule will not work except through uncommon men. You cannot have equality except via inequality.

Up to this point [ . . . ]<sup>v</sup> the present-day view that the Lincolnian conception of democracy is romantic or fantastic—which is now, I take it, preponderant for modern political science—up to this point it is sound. Yet one can also not deny the fact that modern democracy is in fact and not merely in its aspiration or claim egalitarian, and if one does not consider the other side, the criticism remains wrong. Tocqueville’s famous book on democracy in America has exactly this thesis, as you know—that there is an egalitarian movement from the late Middle Ages on which is ever increasing in power. A simple example which everyone knows: in a democracy strictly understood, there cannot be any hereditary aids, or privileges, to public power, no abridgment of rights on account of birth,<sup>5</sup> [nor] on account of sex,<sup>6</sup> [nor] of race. Here we see the clear egalitarian view. To this extent, present-day democracy still asserts, differing from what the Declaration of

<sup>iii</sup> Robert Michels, *Political Parties*, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: The Free Press, 1962).

<sup>iv</sup> Henry A. Wallace (1888-1965) was FDR’s Secretary of Agriculture (1933-1940) and Vice President (1941-1945). He later ran as the Progressive Party candidate in the 1948 presidential election and was a prominent critic from the left of Truman’s Soviet policy. The title referred to here is Frank Kingdon, *An Uncommon Man: Henry Wallace and 60 Million Jobs* (New York: Readers Press, 1945).

<sup>v</sup> The transcript has a blank space here.

Independence explicitly says, all men are by nature equal. The differences due to birth, like family, sex, race, are irrelevant. Hence one man, one vote, which is still admitted today, is a necessary consequence of that egalitarianism.<sup>7</sup> In other words, present-day representatives of democracy are much more democratic than the earlier representatives were. But in one respect they are less democratic in the strict sense. This shows itself in the emphasis on political inequalities, meaning the inequalities of the leaders and the led. But this is justified from the democratic point of view by the demand that the political inequalities should correspond to the natural inequalities, say, to the inequality of talents, and of course also of the cultivation of the talents.

So it is misleading to contrast the *now-prevailing* view of democracy as a realistic view to the *older* view as a romantic or idealistic one. There is as much idealism in the now-prevailing view of democracy as there was in the older one, but a different kind of ideal. The democratic ideal has changed. The present-day radical democrats are not interested in the closest approximation to the rule of the simple people, but rather in a transformation of the simple people—making them more educated and so on. Incidentally, the public opinion polls, which are apart from the legal institutions which were devised (like referenda), are also a means<sup>8</sup> [of bringing] about government of, by, and for the people. A government which would listen in all cases to the public opinion polls would truly be government by the people, by the majority. Since the public opinion polls are a part of present-day democracy as it has developed in the last generation, in this respect the older view of the approximation to direct democracy is still very powerful.

Now to return to Aristotle. He surely did not know of modern democracy in either form,<sup>9</sup> [nor] of the intra-democratic modern controversies. He knew only of the democracy of the Greeks. But modern democracy and Greek democracy have something in common, which is not negligible. In the first place, no property qualifications. And that means that modern democracy as well as ancient democracy is by itself rule of the poor in the sense defined. In one respect, classical democracy is more democratic than modern democracy, but in another respect, it is less democratic. That it is less democratic is shown by the institution of slavery, and no one seriously considered political rights for women. But in other respects it was more democratic, as no one made clearer than Aristotle. Aristotle describes, as a specific democratic institution, election by lot in contradistinction to election by raising the hand, as it were. The latter means voting for candidates, whether secret or open doesn't make any difference. Election by lot—why is that more democratic than by raising the hand? Yes?

**Student:** Because by lot it makes no difference who wins the election, every man in the election is equal.

**LS:** In other words, the chance of becoming president of the United States, if there were election by lot, is equally great for everyone. People who could not possibly get themselves elected as dogcatchers have as great a chance. That is in one sense very democratic. But if we state it as a principle, election by lot means actual equality, the maximum of equality regarding the occupation of ruling offices. Needless to say,<sup>10</sup> classical democracy was not absolutely egalitarian in this respect. Two kinds of offices

especially, generals and treasurers, had to be voted personally, because if a notorious drifter and wastrel would have become treasurer by virtue of the lot, that would be terrible, or if someone completely inept became a general, that would be the same. But wherever feasible, election by lot, whereas in modern times, generally prevailing, election of candidates.

Now the notion underlying election of candidates is simply this: You can *look* at your man for whom you vote and, if you are public-spirited, you will vote for the man who is most worthy of the position or is most able. You will consider merit, whereas election by lot does not consider merit but merely the fact that you are a citizen, a freeman; and therefore, Aristotle says, the election by raising the hands, what we call election, is based on an aristocratic principle, on the principle that the best should rule. Modern democracy is from an Aristotelian point of view a mixture of democracy and aristocracy because of this fact. The elected representatives are supposed to be the elite, the cream of the population. I think it becomes very clear from the *Federalist* papers that this was the original intention. This has certain implications.

Now modern democracy is, as one says, representative or parliamentary. And the notion developed with great force and gravity in the *Federalist* papers is that this is necessary in large states.<sup>vi</sup> Direct democracy belongs to small states and governments, but a large state, in having a representative assembly, requires a great improvement in communication, naturally. Or to put it on a somewhat broader basis, enormous technological advances, which did not exist in classical antiquity, and these technological advances were due at least partly to the advance of modern science. So if one would develop this theme fully, we can say that modern democracy belongs to a type of regime wholly unknown to Aristotle because it is based indirectly, but importantly, on modern science. But what is true of<sup>1</sup> modern democracy is of course also true of modern communism and fascism. So these regimes which we know from our lifetime are fundamentally distinct from the regimes known to Aristotle by the fact that modern science is directly or indirectly presupposed in these specifically modern regimes. So the minimum change which we must make in the Aristotelian arrangement—you remember the six which we had last time [LS writes on the blackboard]—is a new type. For liberal democracy, communism and fascism are radically distinguished from all six by the power of science and modern technology, a thing which had no direct equivalent in classical antiquity. We will come back to that later. But all the more I emphasize the following: these more complex regimes, which we know from our century, cannot be properly understood except through contrast with the simple forms discussed by Aristotle.

Aristotle's analysis of these simple regimes, these six, must still form the basis of the scientific analysis of all regimes, and in particular of those which we know from the present day. One historical point I would like to add. Closer inspection might show that classical democracy, Athenian democracy, is not as unqualifiedly democratic as the democracy defined by Aristotle. In other words, Aristotle presents democracy according to what it claims to be or what it aspires to be, and not as it actually was in Athens. We must therefore make a distinction between what we may call the philosophic concept of

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<sup>vi</sup> See *Federalist* numbers 10 and 14.



democracy and the historical concept of democracy as it arises from the study of the actual institutions and working of Athenian democracy. By the philosophic concept I do not mean something like an ideal type in the sense of Max Weber, an ideal type being a convenient construct and nothing else. For when Aristotle speaks of democracy, he spells out what democracy explicitly intends to be, and whether it achieves it in practice is another story. In other words, it is not a construct of Aristotle but it is a thinking through of what democracy itself claims to be or to achieve. The philosophic concept of democracy which we find in Aristotle takes democracy as it were by its word: You claim that, this is what you imply. It understands it in terms of what democracy intends or wishes to be. This is not a peculiarity of Aristotle, but simply necessary if one wishes to achieve clarity about political things. The historical concept of Athenian democracy is ordinarily based, especially the more popular presentation, on the peak of classical democracy, i.e., democracy under Pericles. And there is one and only one piece of literature to which everyone will turn in order to find out what Periclean democracy is, and as I see from the understanding smile of some of you, I don't have to say what that is . . . because Mr. Levy will say it.

**Mr. Levy:** Surely I'm no substitute for you, Mr. Strauss.

**LS:** Pardon?

**Mr. Levy:** Thucydides' book on the Peloponnesian War.

**LS:** The *funeral speech* which occurs in Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War. But this is not a good procedure because Thucydides, after all, who knew best what he understood by the funeral speech,<sup>12</sup> having composed it [himself], did not think that Periclean Athens was a democracy. He explicitly says it was a democracy only in name, but in fact the rule of the first man. In other words, Thucydides did not pay too great attention to the fact that democratic institutions of course survived under Pericles, because all substantive decisions were made in fact by the first man, Pericles. If one wants to know what Thucydides understands by a democracy in fact, one has to study his presentation of the post-Periclean democracy—Cleon, and so on; or still better, the speech of a Syracusan leader of democracy, Athenagoras, in the Sixth Book, chapters 36 to 40. But this only in order to warn you against a very facile misunderstanding.<sup>vii</sup> Let us now continue in our study of Aristotle with Book 3, which, to repeat, is the central book of the *Politics*, and if one has understood the First Book, as we cannot even attempt here, one has understood Aristotle's political teaching.

We have learned, to repeat, that the most important consideration concerns the regime, and how many good and bad regimes there are. But there is also a popular opinion, an

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<sup>vii</sup> Cleon was one of the so-called "new politicians" who came to power in Athens after the death of Pericles in 429 B.C. He was clearly held in contempt by our two main sources for his character and activities, Thucydides (Bks. III-V) and the playwright Aristophanes (the *Knights*). Athenagoras is otherwise unknown. Pericles' funeral speech is at Thucydides II.35-46; Thucydides's commentary on Periclean democracy ("rule of the first man") is at II.65. For Pericles in Thucydides generally, see I.139-2.65.

accepted opinion, according to which the best regime would be mixed. Then the question arises: Mixed of what kind of simple regimes, and in what proportion or manner should they be mixed? This means that we still stand at the beginning of the whole inquiry. Let us turn to 1281a34.

### Student:

Is it better than any of the other alternatives that the one best man should rule? This is still more oligarchical than the rule of the wealthy few or the few of the better sort,<sup>viii</sup> because the number of those debarred from honors is even greater. It may perhaps be urged that there is still another alternative; that it is a poor sort of policy to vest sovereignty in any person or body of persons,<sup>ix</sup> subject as persons are to the passions that beset men's souls; and that it is better to vest it in law. But this does not solve the difficulty.<sup>x</sup> The law itself may incline towards oligarchy or towards democracy; and what difference will the sovereignty of law then make in the problems which have just been raised? The consequences already stated will follow just the same.<sup>xi</sup>

LS: It doesn't come out clearly enough in the translation, but the point Aristotle makes might be stated as follows. Someone might say: Your whole discussion, Aristotle, is wrong, because you speak of regimes, i.e., the rule of this or that kind of human being. All rule of human beings is wrong: we ought to have rule of laws. A notion with which we are all familiar. Now Aristotle's answer is very simply this: What *kind* of laws? Laws have to be made, framed, adopted, and which laws you adopt will depend on the regime. A democracy will have different laws from an oligarchy, and so on, and so it is no use to say "no rule of men but rule of laws." This is a metaphorical expression which, properly understood, is very sound, but it is a metaphorical expression. Literally, it cannot be true. The fundamental political question cannot be a legal question. Laws are secondary. We have heard, in Aristotle's critique of Hippodamus, in the Second Book, that laws lack the evidence or the rationality of the arts and sciences. We may suggest this connection between the remark here and what we read in Book 2: since most regimes are in fact defective and hence based on untrue assumptions of one kind or another, most laws, being dependent on the regime, lack evidence. If the basis is questionable, what is derivative of it will also be questionable.

Now Aristotle begins the inquiry proper with these words, in 1280a5 or so (Book 3, chapter 9):

<sup>viii</sup> The words "[than the rule of the wealthy few or the few of the better sort]" are bracketed in Barker.

<sup>ix</sup> Barker indicates that "[or body of persons]" is an interpolation.

<sup>x</sup> This sentence is contained in brackets in Barker.

<sup>xi</sup> *Politics* III.1281a32-39.

**Student:** “We must next ascertain what are the distinctive principles attributed by their advocates to oligarchy and democracy,<sup>xii</sup> and what are the oligarchical and democratic conceptions of justice.”<sup>xiii</sup>

**LS:** Now Barker is again, for very respectable reasons—because he wants to help the reader—avoiding Aristotle’s terseness. One can also become too talkative and miss the clear lines: “Let us take first what limits they give, what characterizations they give, of oligarchy and democracy”—he doesn’t necessarily mean what the advocates of either say, but only what people say—“and what the oligarchic and the democratic justice is.” Again understood: just as oligarchic laws are not democratic laws, there is also a democratic notion of justice, which is not the oligarchic notion. We cannot assume that people always agree in political matters as to what justice is. But this most obvious beginning is that he speaks only of oligarchy and democracy. Why does he do that? Because oligarchy and democracy are the most common forms of regime; and Aristotle does not regard this as any accident—he bows to that. Go on now.

**Student:** “For all<sup>xiv</sup> have a hold on a sort of conception of justice; but they both fail to carry it far enough, and neither of them expresses the true conception of justice in the whole of its range.”<sup>xv</sup>

**LS:** In other words, each of them has some understanding of justice. It is not simply fiction what they say about justice. But they don’t go far enough: each concept of justice is one-sided. And Aristotle claims that if one goes the whole way, then one gets a full concept of justice, in which justice is done to both the democratic and oligarchic concepts. Aristotle does not begin, as you see, with the institutional or social basis, but with their claim. And the claim means what they understand by justice. For we are concerned with the best regime, and even the defective regimes claim to be the best. This claim must be met.

**Student:**

In democracies, for example, justice is considered to mean equality in the distribution of office.<sup>xvi</sup> It does mean equality—but equality for those who are equal, and not for all. In oligarchies, again, inequality in the distribution of office is considered to be just; and indeed it is—but only for those who are unequal, and not for all. The advocates of oligarchy and democracy both refuse to consider this factor—who are the persons to whom their principles properly apply—and they both make erroneous judgments. The reason is that they are judging *in their own case*; and most men, as a rule, are bad judges where their own interests are involved. Justice is relative to persons; and a just distribution is one in which the relative values of the things given correspond to those of the persons receiving—a

<sup>xii</sup> The reader omits the interpolation “[now that we have discovered the social ground on which they rest].”

<sup>xiii</sup> *Politics* III.1280a7-9.

<sup>xiv</sup> “For all”: Barker has “Both oligarchs and democrats.”

<sup>xv</sup> III.1280a9-11.

<sup>xvi</sup> The words “[in the distribution of office]” are presented as an interpolation in Barker.

point which has already been made in the *Ethics*.<sup>xvii</sup> But the advocates of oligarchy and democracy, while they agree about what constitutes equality in the *thing*, disagree about what constitutes it in *persons*. The main reason for this is the reason just stated—they are judging, and judging erroneously, in their own case; but there is also another reason—they are misled by the fact that they are professing a sort of conception of justice, and professing it up to a point, into thinking that they profess one which is absolute and complete. The oligarchs think that superiority on one point—in their case wealth—means superiority on all: the democrats believe that equality in one respect—for instance, that of free birth—means equality all around.<sup>xviii</sup>

**LS:** In other words, the insufficiency of both the democratic and the oligarchic view of justice is obvious, according to Aristotle, because equality in some respects does not mean equality in all respects; inequality in some respects does not mean inequality in all respects. The two respects here are free birth and wealth. Now how can you decide between these two? And how can we discover that overriding consideration which is neither wealth nor free birth as such? That is made clear in the immediate sequel. “The most important thing these people do not say. For if men had come together for the sake of property”—do you have that?

**Student:**

If property were the end for which men came together and formed an association, men’s share in the offices and honors<sup>xix</sup> of the city would be proportional to their share of property; and in that case the argument of the oligarchical side—that it is not just for a man who has contributed one pound to share equally in a sum of a hundred pounds (or, for that matter, in the interest accruing upon that sum) with the man who has contributed all the rest—<sup>xx</sup>

**LS:** In other words, if civil society were a trade or moneymaking arrangement of sorts, then the oligarchs would be perfectly right. But that is not the purpose of the polis. Similar considerations apply to the democratic argument. We do not have to read that. Both democrats and oligarchs forget the purpose of political life, which is not acquisition, nor mere life or self-defense, but the good life, the noble life, the life of human excellence. A city is not a city, it is only a defective city, if it is not concerned with the moral character of its associates. And from this, crucial consequences follow. Let us turn [still in Book 3] to 1280b35.

**Student:**

The end and purpose of a polis is the good life, and the institutions of social life are means to that end. A polis is constituted by the association of families and

<sup>xvii</sup> The reader omits the interpolation “[It follows that a just distribution of offices among a number of different persons will involve a consideration of the personal values, or merits, of each of those persons.]”

<sup>xviii</sup> III.1280a11-25.

<sup>xix</sup> Barker indicates that “[in the offices and honors] is an interpolation.”

<sup>xx</sup> III.1280a25-31.

villages in a perfect and self-sufficing existence; and such an existence, on our definition, consists in a life of true felicity and goodness.

It is therefore for the sake of good actions, and not for the sake of social life, that political associations must be considered to exist.<sup>xxi</sup>

**LS:** Yes. More precisely, “for the sake of *noble* actions.” There is a certain difference between “good” and “noble” of which we may have occasion to speak.

**Student:** “Those who contribute most to an association of this character<sup>xxii</sup> have a greater share in the polis<sup>xxiii</sup> than those who are equal to them (or even greater) in free birth and descent, but unequal in civic excellence, or than those who surpass them in wealth but are surpassed by them in excellence.”<sup>xxiv</sup>

**LS:** So in other words, the claim of the oligarchy and democracy is ruled out here very simply but provisionally on this ground: the city’s highest purpose is the good life, i.e., the noble life. Hence the men of noble deeds and noble character have much more claim to rule than the rich as rich and the freemen as freemen. But can these men of virtue have the sole claim? Or is this not precisely the predicament of the city, that it must give way to the claims of those who from the highest point of view do not deserve them? This may be a very bad necessity, but it is a necessity. Let us read on from where we were.

**Student:**

From what has been said it is plain that both sides to the dispute about constitutions i.e. both the democratic and the oligarchical side<sup>xxv</sup> profess only a partial conception of justice.

A difficulty arises when we turn to consider what body of men<sup>xxvi</sup> should be sovereign in the polis:<sup>xxvii</sup> the people at large; the wealthy; the better sort of men; the one man who is best of all; the tyrant. But all these alternatives appear to involve unpleasant results: indeed, how can it be otherwise?<sup>xxviii</sup> What if the poor, on the ground of their being a majority, proceed to divide among themselves the possessions of the wealthy—will not this be unjust? “No, by Zeus”<sup>xxix</sup> (a democrat may reply)—<sup>xxx</sup>

<sup>xxi</sup> The reader drops the interpolation “[This conclusion enables us to attain a proper conception of justice.]” Ibid., III.1280b39-1281a4.

<sup>xxii</sup> Barker adds here the interpolation “[i.e. who contribute most to good action].”

<sup>xxiii</sup> Barker interpolates “[and should therefore, in justice, receive a larger recognition from it].”

<sup>xxiv</sup> III.1281a4-8.

<sup>xxv</sup> “[I.e. both the democratic and the oligarchical side]” is Barker’s interpolation.

<sup>xxvi</sup> In the place of “men” Barker has “persons.”

<sup>xxvii</sup> The reader omits the interpolation “[We can imagine five alternatives].”

<sup>xxviii</sup> Barker interpolates here “[Take, for example, the first alternative.]”

<sup>xxix</sup> Barker renders the oath “by heaven.”

<sup>xxx</sup> III.1281a8-16.

**LS:** “Democrat” is of course not in Aristotle. “Of course, by Zeus, the sovereign, the ruler, decided it justly”—“justly” meaning “in due form.”<sup>xxxix</sup> The people assembled decided to confiscate the property of the rich. That is extremely—the quotation marks, which you find here, are of course not in Aristotle, but the oath, which is in the text, is quite striking. This is one of the *two cases* in which you find an oath in Aristotle, and the other comes very soon. That is quite interesting.

In order to make this clear, in passing, in Plato’s dialogues there are many oaths, and even various oaths: by Zeus, by Hera—Socrates likes to vow by a woman or by a goddess—or by Apollo and others. In Aristotle, so to speak, never, except in the *Politics*. How would you explain that? Well, let us take the simplest example: a demonstration of a mathematical proposition. Do you use oaths there? I mean, the demonstration is in no way affected by the addition of an oath. Either it is demonstrated or it is not demonstrated. But if it is matter of fact, and especially of controversial fact, oaths are of some importance. It shows at least at first glance that the man who says “by Zeus” believes it very strongly. Not necessarily, because he may be a liar, but still there is some presumption. So in other words, when things are controversial and human passions are involved, they swear. And political debate is passionate debate. It is quite interesting, then, that only in Aristotle’s *Politics* among all his works do we find oaths.

**Student:** “But if this is not the extreme of injustice,<sup>xxxix</sup> what is?”<sup>xxxix</sup>

**LS:** Now Aristotle develops this at great length. All these kinds of men—the multitude, the wealthy, the gentlemen, the single man who surpasses all others in goodness, and the tyrant—they all raise claims. And each is convinced that his claim is obviously reasonable. The people confiscate the property of the rich. Of course it is right: the *dēmos*, the sovereign, decided it in a legal manner. But Aristotle says: Look, that means they take away property merely on the basis of the fact that they have the power. What does the tyrant do?<sup>l3</sup> Can you leave it at that? Now what is the outcome of all this? Democracy, tyranny, and oligarchy are all bad because they absolutize the right of a part, whose interests are not identical with the interests of the whole. The *dēmos*, by destroying the wealth, destroys itself and the polis, and therefore it cannot be good. The action of the *dēmos* against the rich is as coercive as that of the tyrant. But what about the gentleman, the good man?

**Student:**

Should the better sort of men have authority and be sovereign in all matters? In that case, the rest of the citizens will necessarily be debarred from honors, since they will not enjoy the honor of holding civic office. We speak of offices as honors; and when a single set of persons hold office permanently, the rest of the community must necessarily be debarred from all honors.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

<sup>xxxix</sup> Apparently Strauss’s own translation of the sequel to the longer quotation.

<sup>xxxix</sup> The reader omits “(we may reply in turn).”

<sup>xxxix</sup> *Politics* III.1281a16-17.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> III.1281a28-32.

**LS:** So in other words, the people of defective decency, those who are not gentlemen, are debarred from honors if only the gentlemen rule. But do they deserve honor? At first glance, of course not. But what is Aristotle's point? Why must they be given some power in spite of that? Let us go on.

**Student:** "Is it better than any of the other alternatives that the one best man should rule? This is still more oligarchical,<sup>xxxv</sup> because the number of those debarred from office<sup>xxxvi</sup> is even greater."<sup>xxxvii</sup>

**LS:** In other words, all others are dishonored. They have no access to honor by position.

**Student:**

It may perhaps be urged that there is still another alternative; that it is a poor sort of policy to vest sovereignty in one person or body of persons,<sup>xxxviii</sup> subject as persons are to the passions that beset men's souls; and that it is better to vest it in law.<sup>xxxix</sup> The law itself may incline either towards oligarchy or towards democracy; and what difference will the sovereignty of law then make in the problems which have just been raised? The consequences already stated will follow just the same.

The other alternatives may be reserved for a later inquiry; but the first of the alternatives suggested—that the people at large should be sovereign rather than the few best—would appear to be defensible, and while it presents some difficulty it perhaps also contains some truth.<sup>xl</sup>

**LS:** Now what Aristotle means by the rule of laws, we have discussed before. The laws are in a way even more virtuous than the gentlemen, because there is no gentleman who doesn't make some mistake from time to time. But the laws have no passion, therefore should they not rule? But we know why they cannot: because they have no power. This applies retroactively also to the gentlemen, whose power is too small to rule the city. We have to make this disgraceful concession, because we have to make concessions to sheer power. That is the argument up to this point. Now Aristotle must change the argument radically. And since, from the point of view of sheer brachial power, the many are much more powerful than the few rich, we have to consider much more seriously the claims of democracy. And therefore the ensuing discussion leads up to a qualified argument in favor of democracy.

It is very interesting: we have here a case made for democracy, not for oligarchy, although from a formal point of view they seem to be equally bad. Aristotle develops here at length that the many may be superior to the few gentlemen in virtue and

<sup>xxxv</sup> The reader omits the interpolation "[than the rule of the wealthy few or the few of the better sort]."

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Barker has not "office" but "honors."

<sup>xxxvii</sup> III.1281a32-34.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> The words "[or body of persons]" are presented as an interpolation in Barker.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Barker interpolates here "[But this does not solve the difficulty.]"

<sup>xl</sup> 1281a34-42.

understanding by virtue of a kind of summative process: they are assembled in meeting and each gives his might, each hears the arguments, and the net result may be a higher collective wisdom than the wisdom of any individual by himself. Aristotle makes here a qualification in the sequel: 1280b15.

**Student:** “It is not clear, however, that this combination of qualities, which we have made the ground of distinction between the many and the few best, is true of all popular bodies and all large masses of men. Perhaps it may be said, ‘By Zeus,’<sup>xli</sup> it is clear that there are some bodies of which it cannot possibly be true; for if you included them” —

**LS:** Yet again, another sermon where we do not know—surely not the democrat because there is an antidemocratic bent. Either by the oligarch or by Aristotle; this is a nice ambiguity here.

**Student:** “For if you included them, you would by necessity be bound to include a herd of beasts.”<sup>xlii</sup>

**LS:** The argument in favor of the *dēmos*—its collective virtue and wisdom may be superior to the virtue of any individual, however virtuous and wise—cannot be true of every *dēmos*. It must be a specially educated one. Aristotle leads then up to a conclusion: Yes, that is all right, that makes sense. But on one thing he must insist: the many,<sup>14</sup> if they are of this good kind of *dēmos*,<sup>15</sup> must fully participate in deliberating and judging—that is democracy—but they cannot be admitted to the ruling magistrates, because here not the *dēmos* assembled, with its collective wisdom, but only the individual with his very poor judgment enters. Yet a new difficulty arises. The many are understood to be, as individuals, ignoramuses, non-knowers. Can the non-knowers be judges of the knowers? For example, a physician is to be appointed. Who can judge of his competence? Only physicians. Engineers, fortification experts—same story. But this speaks against democracy. Democracy must then delegate an enormous part of its power to a nondemocratic body. Aristotle gives this way out: on certain things the non-knowers are as good judges or even better judges than the experts, namely, insofar as the user is a better judge than the maker. Whatever a carpenter<sup>16</sup> or a collegium of carpenters may tell you about the excellence of a bed, if when you lie on it you can’t find sleep because of the unevenness, this layman’s judgment is better than what the experts say. So in other words, there is a large region in which everyone with his ordinary common sense is as good a judge as any expert.

[change of tape]

**LS:** —under certain conditions, if you have a *dēmos* of a certain character, democracy is perfectly all right, as all the arguments taken from wisdom and virtue, which at first glance seem to speak against democracy, speak in favor of democracy. Reasonable lovers of democracy must be perfectly satisfied—that is one crucial point in the Aristotelian argument. Now he begins a new discussion of the same subject, in 3.1282b14.

<sup>xli</sup> Barker translates the oath “by heaven.”

<sup>xlii</sup> In the place of “by necessity” Barker writes “by the same token.” *Politics* III.1281b15-19.



**Student:**

In all arts and sciences the end in view is some good. In the most sovereign of all the arts and sciences—and this is the art and science of politics—the end in view is the greatest good and the good which is most pursued. The good in the sphere of politics is justice; and justice consists in what tends to promote the common interest. General opinion makes it consist in some sort of equality. Up to a point this general opinion agrees with the philosophical inquiries which contain our conclusions on ethics. In other words, it holds that justice involves two factors—things, and the persons to whom things are assigned—and it considers that persons who are equal should have assigned to them equal things. But here there arises a question which must not be overlooked. Equals and unequals—yes; but equals and unequals *in what?* This is a question which raises difficulties, and involves us in philosophical speculation on politics.<sup>xliii</sup>

**LS:** I will not discuss this translation except to say that these two references to philosophy occur in the original, and that is very rare in such a book as the *Politics*. There is one point to be corrected: when he says “of all arts and sciences, the end is some good, and to the highest degree in the most authoritative of the sciences, but this is the political faculty”—not as he translates it. More literally, in Greek: *politikē dynamis*, “political power.” That is a kind of joke Aristotle makes. “*Dynamis*” has this double meaning: that of power, but it can also mean the faculty of doing things political. Then it would be the political art or science. The joke consists in the fact that political power is here treated somewhat for a moment as an art or science, which makes us forget the harsh aspect of political power, you know, the more practical power. For the meaning of this, and also of the twofold reference to philosophy, the question of wisdom comes now to the fore.

Hitherto we have seen that what we ordinarily meet<sup>xliv</sup> in the form of wisdom we can have in a properly constituted and balanced democracy. But there is another problem of wisdom which we have to face. Now what is that? How does this problem appear? The question concerns the various forms of excellences, as he makes clear. Now excellence is taken in this sense: that if some man excels, he excels over others, he is superior to them—the inequality of excellence, which sometimes when we use the word we do not remember. When we use the word “virtue,” we do not think of the inequality it necessarily implies. Aristotle stresses this point here now. The implication is that the greatest of all excellences by virtue of which men can surpass one another is that of wisdom. But this is not yet developed. Aristotle makes first clear, starting from the political fact that while excellences are at the bottom of every political claim, not every excellence is of political relevance. Well, we all know that. Someone may be an excellent tightrope dancer, or a ballerina, or a dogcatcher, or a chess player: this is not an excellence in itself of any political relevance. But always there are excellences, superiorities involved. Now here we have the claims of these various excellences: wealth, wisdom, free birth, and so on. How do we settle the claim between these various claimants? And Aristotle takes here an example: If the things to be distributed were

<sup>xliii</sup> *Politics* III.1282b14-23.

<sup>xliv</sup> It is possible that Strauss said “need” and that “meet” is a mistranscription.

flutes, what would a sensible distributor do? Would he give the best flutes to the rich or the most handsome, or to the best flute players? And Aristotle says [that] if he had a free hand, he would give them to the best flute players, i.e., the best knowers. The application is clear: if political office is to be distributed, it is possible they should be given to the best knowers, to the men who understand political things best. Now this leads to the consequence that one must accept the rule of a single outstandingly virtuous man, even if he is poor, because what has absence of money or wealth to do with ability to judge wisely? One could go a step further, though Aristotle only implies it here: If this is so, why not give the sovereign power to a man who is a conventional slave, if he is much wiser than all the master's class? If he is supremely wise, why should he not rule? This whole argument leads to the conclusion that the best regime would be the absolute rule of the absolutely superior man. Let us read that, 3.1284a4.

### Student:

If there is one person (or several persons, but yet not enough to form the full measure of a state) so pre-eminently superior in goodness that there can be no comparison between the goodness and political capacity which he shows (or several show, when there is more than one) and what is shown by the rest, such a person, or such persons, can no longer be treated as part of a city. Being so greatly superior to others in goodness and political capacity, they will suffer injustice if they are treated as worthy only of an equal share; for a person of this order may very well be like a god among men. This being the case, it is clear that law generally<sup>xlv</sup> is necessarily limited to those who are equal in birth and capacity. There can be no law which runs against men who are utterly superior to others. They are a law in themselves. It would be a folly to attempt to legislate for them—<sup>xlvi</sup>

LS: Let us leave it<sup>17</sup> here. And that is the conclusion: if a man is of truly superior wisdom and virtue, surpassing all others in virtue and wisdom, then he cannot possibly be treated as an equal, because he is manifestly superior, i.e., unequal—and since wisdom and virtue are those qualifications which are as important for government as the art of flute-playing is for flute-playing, there is no way out but to give him this power. Now this leads to a longer discussion which we cannot follow here, a discussion of the democratic alternative to this treatment, and that is ostracism, which was as a legal institution in Athens: that an innocent citizen could be banished from the city merely because his mere existence or presence endangered the equality of others. He was a living challenge to the equality before all because of his manifest superiority. Aristotle says that this institution of ostracism has some political justice. “Political justice” means here justice with a view to the requirements of the city.

This, incidentally, is a passage which one should consider when studying Aristotle's teaching regarding natural justice or natural right in the Fifth Book of the *Ethics*, where he finds the paradoxical thesis that all right, natural or conventional, is changeable. This passage is usually not taken seriously. Here we see what Aristotle means by that: a man

<sup>xlv</sup> Barker interpolates “[as well as any particular rule of equality in the distribution of office].”

<sup>xlvi</sup> *Politics* III.1284a3-15.

who has done no wrong, who is superior to all others, is apparently punished, deprived of his right, because he in fact constitutes a danger to the democracy as established. So the strict rule—you must never punish or deprive of good things a just man—is here justly transgressed because of the overwhelming interests of the established regimes. This only in passing.

But Aristotle does not think this is defensible and understandable, that democracy strives to protect itself from such a “quote danger unquote,” but the true solution would of course be to hand over the whole power in the city to this superior man. The man of outstanding virtue ought to be lifelong king, and that is the only solution. Now this is a very strange argument. We have first the most powerful argument ever made by Aristotle, to say nothing of Plato, in favor of democracy: a democracy, qualified in certain matters, satisfies all reasonable political demands. And then we suddenly are confronted with the most antidemocratic thing, namely, the rule of an absolute king, who has all powers, and we must understand what Aristotle means by that. In the later Books, neither democracy as described in Book 3 nor the kingship as<sup>18</sup> mentioned here is discussed. In other words, for the fundamental political considerations, the understanding of these two fundamental possibilities, that good democracy as sketched here and absolute monarchy, is absolutely essential, from Aristotle’s point of view.

Now after having gone so far, Aristotle goes over, without giving any reason, to a discussion of one kind of regime, namely, kingship. You know we must never forget the external *schēma*—kingship, aristocracy, democracy, and also polity, and so on—which is the framework of the Aristotelian discussion. Therefore, why should he not speak of kingship now? But it is clear, there is a direct connection with what preceded. The fundamental consideration led up to the problem of the absolutely superior individual, who as such would have to be king, and Aristotle then uses this opportunity to append to that a discussion of the various kinds of kingship, most of which are on a much lower level, of course. He distinguishes five different kinds of kingship, but only two require discussion since the other three are only in between. And he discusses only the two extreme cases. The one is the absolute king, of whom we have heard before; the other is a king like the Spartan king, practically only a lifelong and hereditary general. And Aristotle says this question is of no fundamental interest, because the institution of lifelong generalship you can have under any regime. and for one reason or another, a democracy, oligarchy, or kingship can have lifelong generals. Again, a beautiful illustration of the principle that whatever is politically neutral, whatever can occur in every regime, is as such politically uninteresting. A simple example from another scheme: if you live in a country which depends for mere survival on an irrigation system, and this is generally known and admitted, the irrigation system is not a political issue. It is very important, the whole country would be ruined if the irrigation system broke down, but it is unpolitical: a simple example of the fact that something can be very important and politically absolutely unimportant. And there is of course the opposite, which can *never* be: that something is politically important and otherwise unimportant. Or can you think of an example?

**Student:** In *Gulliver's Travels* [inaudible] it is obviously very important to the whole question of regimes, but not in itself.

**LS:** Yes, but from which point of view? Only if you transcend the political sphere. In other words, for a philosopher it would be very unimportant, but for Lilliputians it would be very important. Yes, to that extent you are right. But since we are ordinary human beings, I believe we can say that whatever is politically important can never be simply unimportant. One would have to raise very high in order to be able to say what you just said.

Now in this section about kingship, which is the last part of Book 3, Aristotle opens up again the question of the universal or absolute king and defends this institution against antiroyalists. The antiroyalists base their argument on rule of law rather than rule of men, an argument of which Aristotle had already disposed earlier. The laws themselves depend also on human beings who frame them and who enforce them. Now what is the meaning of this long discussion? After Aristotle has solved the problem of the best political regime (as far as it is possible to do so in a general discussion) in favor of a moderate acceptance of democracy, which is perfectly satisfactory, at least to us—that he takes up then such an extreme possibility, this absolute king, what is the reason for that? A stupid answer, but in a way a learned answer (because something can be both stupid and learned), is to say that Aristotle follows Plato, who had said in his *Laws* there are two models of regimes: democracy and monarchy.<sup>xlvii</sup> Aristotle tries to do justice to this Platonic observation. But that only pushes the question back: why did Plato make this remark, and what does it mean for Plato? In the Third Book of the *Politics*, we recall, Aristotle started in the concrete discussion of an entirely different dualism, the dualism of democracy and oligarchy, which politically was obvious everywhere: rule of the rich, rule of the poor. And he decided, one can say, rather in favor of democracy than in favor of oligarchy. But now we have an entirely different polarity: not democracy or oligarchy, but democracy [or] absolute kingship. Now what is behind that? The question has to do with the problem of laws. Democracy, while it makes the democratic laws, necessarily acts through laws. In every regime where more than one man rules, there must be some legal order. I mean, you must have arrangements for how to reach decisions, and who should preside—a question which doesn't arise as such in a monarchy, where the king is the presiding officer as a matter of course, and all these formalities aren't as necessary in a kingship as they are in a democracy.

Now what is the point? I make this suggestion: that this absolute marvel of a king, surpassing everyone in wisdom and virtue, is the political reflection of the philosopher-king in Plato's sense. Aristotle does not speak of the philosopher-king, but it is the philosopher-king who is visible only in his kingly function. So the question of democracy and absolute kingship would be a reflection of the whole question regarding the relation of the city and philosophy. Democracies of course stand for the city, and the king stands for philosophy. The fact that there is such an issue has its root in a fundamental disproportion between philosophy and the city. For the time being I remind you of what is implied by Aristotle's criticism of Hippodamus in the Second Book, namely, the

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<sup>xlvii</sup> *Laws*, Book III, 693d.

fundamental difference between the arts, intellectual arts, and the laws. There is a fundamental recalcitrance of the city to philosophy, which could be overcome, theoretically, if there were philosopher-kings. The reason for this disharmony is that the ends of the philosophers and of the non-philosophers are radically different. Philosophy is concerned with understanding, with contemplation, we may call it; the non-philosophers are not concerned with this, with whatever else they may be concerned. Now here we touch on the fundamental difference between modern and premodern philosophy and, in particular, political philosophy. We do not understand this side of classical political philosophy in Plato and Aristotle because we are sons or daughters of the modern age. In modern times, from the very beginning, the leading philosophers were of the opinion that philosophy itself will bring about, and not accidentally, a harmony between philosophy and the city. And how could this be, if the end of philosophy were the same as the end of the non-philosophers? Let us assume that the end of the non-philosophers is something like terrestrial, earthly happiness—housing, health, clothing, and so on—and that philosophy or science (that means almost the same in earlier times) is there for the sake of making possible the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Then the end of philosophy and the end of the non-philosophers would be identical, the gulf between them would be bridged. To this we add another consideration, linked to the first, and that is that owing to the view which emerged in the seventeenth century and then prevailed, philosophy or science necessarily brings about enlightenment of the non-philosophers or scientists and therefore revolutionizes the opinion of the citizen body, public opinion, political opinion, and therewith revolutionizes political society. Therefore there is no problem regarding its influence—the positive influence of philosophy on society, regarding the harmony between philosophy and society.

This I link with what I said earlier: the new kind of regimes, which Aristotle did not consider, like liberal democracy, communism, and fascism, these new kinds of regimes must be traced to their theoretical principle, which is not necessarily visible at the first glance; not very recondite, but still, it needs some analysis. And then I think you will come back—surely in the case of liberal democracy and communism (in the case of Russia it is a bit more complicated)—you will come back to the fact that in these modern doctrines, the enlightenment of the citizen body—and “enlightenment” means here not merely enlightenment about their rights and duties but a general kind of enlightenment: enlightenment as the spreading of *scientific* information, of scientific understanding—is the condition for the establishment of the best order of society.

I can illustrate it by one extreme example, but it has a great merit (extreme examples can be very helpful when they show the simple lines very clearly), and that is Thomas Hobbes, who plays a crucial role for modern political thought. Hobbes built his whole doctrine on the view that there is one and only one natural right, fundamental right: self-preservation, based on the inescapable character of the fear of death, in particular of violent death. And this he built up. There are many difficulties, some very striking; for example, that in Hobbes’s time there were many examples of people who were not afraid of violent death at all and, especially in the religious wars, people who were prepared to die for what they regarded as a true faith. Now Hobbes has to face this question, because if these people are right, Hobbes is entirely wrong: you cannot build a political doctrine

on the fear of violent death. Hobbes called religion “fear of powers invisible,” and he raises the question: Which is the greater fear, that of violent death, or that of powers invisible? And then he says: While the power of the powers invisible is greater than that of the powers visible, speaking from the point of view of religion, the *fear* of death is stronger than the fear of powers invisible. But this seems to be absurd. What is behind Hobbes’s argument, which is in a sense self-contradictory, is this. By nature, according to truth and nature, the fear of violent death is the greatest force, the rock-bottom of society. This is endangered by the fear of powers invisible, therefore the rational and natural order will not work if the fear of powers invisible is not taken away—in other words, if the people are not enlightened.

Hobbes’s political schema is the first which exists which requires for its working, on any level, popular enlightenment. Hobbes even speaks of popular enlightenment. He says somewhere, “gradually the vulgar become educated”—*Paulatim eruditur vulgus*.<sup>xlviii</sup> Now what in Hobbes is only discernible if you follow strictly the theoretical argument became quite visible in the eighteenth century, in the age of enlightenment par excellence. Here we find more and more doctrines which demand for their political efficacy popular enlightenment. There is nothing of this kind in Plato and Aristotle. That a certain degree of theoretical understanding is necessary for the rulers in an aristocratic regime, that was of course admitted, and there is a discussion of that in the first book of Cicero’s *Republic*. But not this notion. The notion of enlightenment is a peculiarly modern notion, and it gives modern politics its peculiar character. The propaganda of which we hear so much—Marx’s propaganda—is primarily meant to be, of course, enlightenment about the true character of the social forces. That this has long been abandoned, especially since Stalin’s time, is another matter.

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<sup>1</sup> Deleted “but.”

<sup>2</sup> Deleted “the.”

<sup>3</sup> Deleted “Now.”

<sup>4</sup> Deleted “not.”

<sup>5</sup> Deleted “and.”

<sup>6</sup> Deleted “and.”

<sup>7</sup> Deleted “Still in one respect.

<sup>8</sup> Deleted “to bring.”

<sup>9</sup> Deleted “and.”

<sup>10</sup> Deleted “that.”

<sup>11</sup> Deleted “democracy.”

<sup>12</sup> Deleted “he.”

<sup>13</sup> Deleted “Is this.”

<sup>14</sup> Deleted “may.”

<sup>15</sup> Deleted “they.”

<sup>16</sup> Deleted “may tell you about the.”

<sup>17</sup> Deleted “at.”

<sup>18</sup> Deleted “we.”

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<sup>xlviii</sup> Hobbes, *De Homine*, 14, 13.

**Session 14: March 18, 1965**

**Leo Strauss:** I remind you again of the main topic of Aristotle's *Politics*, the regime, which means the variety of regimes. In order to study them properly, we are in need of a comprehensive view of all possible regimes. Aristotle provides us with such a schema in his enumeration of the six regimes which I outlined some time ago.<sup>i</sup> You remember these: from the point of view of number, and from the point of view of goodness and badness. There is a complete enumeration, nothing is left out. But there is this disjunction: these are merely numerical or formal distinctions, which is good enough for guaranteeing comprehensiveness but not good enough for understanding certain things. We must replace "the few and the many," if we want to understand the political things, by "the rich and the poor," and hence by the two regimes in which either the rich or the poor prevail, oligarchy or democracy. This leads naturally to the consideration, since both oligarchy and democracy are defective, of whether there is not a mean between them which has the advantages of each, while avoiding the disadvantages. These are, on the lower level, the polity, and on the higher level, aristocracy. Oligarchy, democracy, polity, and aristocracy.<sup>ii</sup> In the comprehensive scheme we have six. Which are missing?

**Student:** Monarchy and tyranny.

**LS:** Yes, and what do they have in common?

**Student:** There's only one person who chairs the government.

**LS:** Who rules. So in other words, these four regimes have this in common, that they are all republican regimes. Tyranny can be simply disregarded, and as for kingship, it is no longer possible according to Aristotle once cities have reached a certain size or maturity.

Now the beginning of the political, *practical* inquiry is from democracy and oligarchy, just as we today would begin with democracy and communism, whatever phenomena we might take in later—Franco's Spain, or Salazar's Portugal—but they are not in the foreground, the way in which democracy and communism are in the foreground. Now the difficulty which Aristotle confronts is this: both democracy and oligarchy are bad, for different reasons. One can state a common reason: the principle of neither democracy [n]or oligarchy is virtue. The good regimes are those in which the virtuous and the wise, and only the virtuous and the wise, rule. The first reaction of such hardheaded people as we are, is: Fairy tales. And this is, I'm sure, the reaction of the large majority of the professions. Nevertheless, we hear political men even today speak of the pursuit of excellence. And "excellence," one can say, is a translation of "virtue." Or of "high

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<sup>i</sup> See session 12.

<sup>ii</sup> The six-fold schema according to number of rulers and whether they rule for the common good or their own advantage: monarchy (1), aristocracy (few), polity (many) for the common good; democracy (many), oligarchy (few), tyranny (1) for the rulers' advantage. Strauss includes all the options in principle and underlines all later re-classifications.

culture.” People are concerned with culture on all levels but I believe, if confronted with a choice between low and high culture, they would not dare to come out for low culture in preference to the high. Far from being extraneous to the city, excellence is its highest end. The greatest error which any student of political science can make is to forget or to minimize this end, the need for which will assert itself in unexpected quarters. To understand this fact properly, we must remember something which is easily forgotten: that the highest is not necessarily the most urgent. I mean, the fantastic people—the so-called idealists, or however they call them, the missionaries—they forget that the highest is not necessarily the most urgent. Aristotle never forgets this. The simplest example from everyday life: appendectomy may be the most urgent thing for a man, but it can never be the highest for him. The pragmatic proof is when you meet a man who has undergone an appendectomy, you never admire him for it. [Laughter] You may envy him that he survived it, but you do not admire him. The highest end of the city is not its sole end.

In other words, as Aristotle puts it, the city comes into being for the sake of life, but it exists for the sake of the good life. And this primary end, the mere life, of course subsists all the time. Every man is always concerned with his sheer self-preservation, apart from any concern with reform, with improvement, or whatever else. Since the highest end of the city is not its sole end, the claims of those men who are not virtuous or wise must always be considered. After all, they too want to live, although they are unwilling and unable to live virtuously. In other words, if we consider only the highest end of the city, we arrive at the conclusion that the only legitimate claim to rule is that of the virtuous and wise, ruling in their own right, not by virtue of delegation or election. That is an absurdity from Aristotle’s point of view, that the virtuous and wise should rule by delegation: How can the lower give the title to the higher?

Yet this view, that the only legitimate rule is aristocracy in this sense, suffers from an obvious flaw because it abstracts from something of the utmost importance, and we all know today what it is from which this view mistakenly abstracts. It is now called power—a very loose word; we mean here of course *political* power. But this means primarily brachial power, the power of muscle, from which such beautiful expressions as “muscling in” are derived. This can never be forgotten. But not under all conditions is mere brachial power sufficient. In the case of very simple armaments, it is so; but if the armaments become more complex—think of armored knights versus very strong blacksmiths—then the armored knights are likely to best the blacksmiths. There came a well-known equalizer in the nineteenth century which made possible the equal status of all fighters, as everyone could learn to handle rifles. Today, as we all know, the situation has again radically changed. But it still comes down to this: the power to kill.<sup>1</sup> [Hence] the emphasis in Hobbes on violent death. This is therefore an important consideration. I would like to read to you a passage from Plato’s *Laws*, from the Third Book, which might be helpful here.

—What and how many are the agreed claims in the matter of ruling and being ruled, alike in cities, large and small, and in households? Is not the right of father



and mother one of them? And in general, would not the claim of parents to rule over offspring be a claim universally correct?

—Certainly.

—And next to this, the right of the ignoble to rule over the noble? And then, following on these as a third claim, the right of older people to rule and of younger to be ruled?

—Sure.

—The fourth right is that slaves ought to be ruled and masters ought to rule.

—Undoubtedly.

—And the fifth is, I imagine, that the stronger should rule and the weaker be ruled.

In the four preceding ones, strength as strength did not enter.

—A truly compulsory form of rule.

—Yes, and one that is very prevalent in all kinds of arguments, being according to nature, as Pindar of Thebes once said. The most important claim, it would seem, is the sixth, which ordains that the man without understanding should follow, and the wise man rule. Nevertheless, my most wise Pindar, this is a thing that I for one would hardly assert to be against nature, but rather according to nature, the natural rule of law without coercion over willing subjects. The link being that law, as a product of human wisdom, is ruling wisdom.

—You speak with perfect correctness.

—To be loved by the gods, and to have good luck, marks the seventh form of rule, where we bring a man forward for casting of lots, and declare that if he gains the lot, he will most justly be the ruler, but if he fails, he shall take his place among the ruled.<sup>iii</sup>

This is a seemingly disorderly enumeration of seven claims to rule, which all have to be considered and are considered by Plato in the *Laws*, but the one to which I particularly wish to draw your attention is that sheer strength, brachial power, is a political consideration. And since the virtuous and wise are not necessarily bodily stronger than the vicious and unwise, there is a fundamental difficulty regarding aristocracy. It is then necessary to pay careful attention to what we will call the submoral claims, the claims not based on virtue but, say, on mere strength. Or on mere old age, because not in all cases are the older the wiser: strange as it may sound, sometimes the son may be wiser than his father. But political science would be incomplete if it did not also consider the supramoral, not only the submoral, namely, philosophy or the theoretical understanding: the possibility, namely, that society receive a decisive direction from the intellectual, spiritual claim beyond the merely moral claim. You all have heard of Plato's philosopher-king, and we have discussed in this class Comte's proposal regarding the spiritual government of men of science, and there are quite a few other proposals which one may meet in between.<sup>iv</sup> Aristotle does not explicitly discuss this very interesting problem, the suprapolitical. He leaves it at a discussion of the political and the

<sup>iii</sup> *Laws*, Book III, 690a-d. Apparently Strauss's translation.

<sup>iv</sup> Session 1.

subpolitical. The reason for this is that, in his view, the sphere of morality and of the polis is closed: you can find your bearings there without particular attention to what transcends the polis. Nevertheless, Aristotle refers to this problem because he is a comprehensive thinker—implicitly or, rather, allusively.

Now let us first turn to the end of Book 3, the very end.

**Student:** “After these things have been determined,<sup>v</sup> we must next attempt to treat of the best form of constitution, asking ourselves, ‘Under what conditions does it tend to arise, and how can it be established?’ In order to make a proper inquiry into this subject, it is necessary—”<sup>vi</sup>

**LS:** And read the note of Barker: “It is necessary.” What does Barker say here?

**Student:** “The words at the close of this chapter are repeated at the beginning of Book 7.”<sup>vii</sup>

**LS:** Yes. In other words, Book 3 is obviously followed by Book 4, but there is an indication in the last sentence of Book 3 that the continuation is in Books 7 and 8. That is one of the most obvious textual difficulties in Aristotle’s *Politics*. What he means, I believe, is this. We can go on from this broad consideration of regimes, which moves ultimately between the poles of absolute kingship and democracy—one can go on from there to Books 4 to 6, which do not deal with the best regime. Or one can go on to Books 7 and 8, which contain a detailed discussion of the best regime. Both are possible, but the reasoning is this: one cannot see the more or less imperfect regimes discussed in the central Books without awareness of the best. May I ask why one cannot do that, say, in the ordinary democracy or oligarchy, why one cannot study that without awareness of the best?

**Student:** One can only see the story, in his *Metaphysics*, after knowing the truth by nature.

**LS:** That is very sophisticated. In the simple language which every commonsensical man or woman can understand?

**Student:** We have to know the good form to know what is perverted or not good.

**LS:** Yes. And therefore it is important to see a bad or more or less imperfect regime as what it is, if you do not know what the best is. Its imperfection is as much a part of its being as its sensible qualities, red, blue, and so on. But on the other hand, one cannot spell out the institutions, the detailed institutions, of the best regimes without learning

<sup>v</sup> “These issues determined,” is the exact wording in Barker.

<sup>vi</sup> *Politics* III.1288b2-6.

<sup>vii</sup> “The words at the close of this chapter, which ends in this abrupt manner, are repeated exactly at the beginning of Book VII.” Barker, p. 152 n.

something from the actual institutions of the imperfect regimes. This I believe is the simple solution to this textual difficulty.

Now let us then turn first to Books 7 and 8, in which Aristotle discusses the best regime. The best regime requires that we know which way of life is choiceworthy, the most choiceworthy. In order to answer that, we must know what the principles of choice are, what the things are we esteem and desire, the good things. There are three of them: external goods; those in the body—health, strength, and beauty; and those in the soul. Those in the body belong to us, obviously—they cannot be taken away from us as property or even reputation can be taken away from us. Happiness requires that we have all three kinds, therefore there is no question regarding the end of human life. In other words, Aristotle does not believe there is a cause for what is now called relativism. Let us now read 1323a27. That is, “All these things must belong to the happy or blessed. For no one would call someone blessed”—

#### Student:

No one would call a man happy who had no particle of fortitude, temperance, justice, or wisdom i.e., none of the goods of the soul:<sup>viii</sup> who feared the flies buzzing about his head; who abstained from none of the extremest forms of extravagance whenever he felt hungry or thirsty; who would ruin his dearest friends for the sake of a farthing; whose mind was as senseless, and as much astray, as that of a child or a madman. These are all propositions which would be accepted by nearly everyone as soon as they were stated. But differences begin to arise when we ask, “How much of each good should men have? And what is the relative superiority of one good over another?” Any modicum of goodness<sup>ix</sup> is regarded as adequate; but wealth and property, power, reputation, and all such things, are coveted to an excess which knows no bounds or limits. There is an answer which can be given to men who act in this way. “The facts themselves make it easy for you to assure yourselves on these issues. You can see for yourselves that the goods of the soul are not gained or maintained by the external goods. It is the other way around. You can see for yourselves that felicity—no matter whether men find it in pleasure, or goodness, or both of the two—belongs more to those who have cultivated their character and mind to the uttermost, and kept acquisition of external goods within moderate limits, than it does to those who have managed to acquire more external goods than they can possibly use, and are lacking in the goods of the soul.”<sup>x</sup>

**LS:** This is Aristotle’s simple argument: there can be no doubt about that, that the goods of the soul are higher than those of the body, and those of the body higher than these other things, the external goods. But all three are needed. And the question concerns only that regarding which there may very well be controversy: How *much* of each in a given situation? There is no general answer possible to this question.

<sup>viii</sup> Barker interpolates “[i.e. none of the goods of the soul].”

<sup>ix</sup> The reader omits the interpolation “[i.e. of the ‘goods of the soul’].”

<sup>x</sup> *Politics* VII.1323a27-b6.

Now what do we say about Aristotle's argument? Let us assume that we could have the privilege of having Mr. Giancana in our midst. I suppose you know who he is, he is reputed to be a leader of the crime syndicate in this city.<sup>xi</sup> What would he say? Assuming we could really bring him down to a theoretical discussion, which I would not take for granted. He might possibly agree with everything for very obvious reasons, in order to present himself as a nice man, just as he would do some other things for that reason. But what would he say? Would he not admit that a man who is afraid of every fly or every insect is a miserable man? Because this man would of course be afraid of everything. He would live in constant misery for reasons of fear. Now what about a man who is very foolish, in the simple sense of the term, that he always makes the wrong choices? I believe again that Giancana would say this is also not a happy man, because how can he stay out of jail if he is so stupid? [Laughter] I cannot develop this point fully, but I will draw your attention to it. In the extreme attacks on ordinary morality you find, say, in Plato's *Gorgias*, in Callicles' famous attack—courage, manliness, on the one hand, and prudence, cleverness, on the other,<sup>2</sup> are admitted to be virtues. They are not controversial. The difficulty would concern the two others in the Platonic scheme, moderation and justice. That leads therefore to a long discussion.<sup>xii</sup> But Aristotle makes clear at the beginning of this whole work—for the *Politics* is only the second part of the work, the first part being the *Nicomachean Ethics*—that he is addressing only well-bred men, only gentlemen. They of course will not raise gangster-like objections, but it becomes necessary for us also, no doubt, to consider the phenomenon of the gangster—and then we will have to turn to Plato, who has some arguments or people defending gangsterism, and we must see how we can overcome that.

Now the next point that Aristotle makes, which is crucial, is that the happiness of the individual and the happiness of the city are the same. So if someone believes that the happiness of man consists in being rich, then he will also say that the happiness of the city consists in being rich. From that it follows, of course, that the best regime would be directed above all to the goods of the soul, to the virtues of the mind, although it also leads to bodily goods and external goods. So this is a very strange assertion for us—I will come back to that later—that the end of the city and the end of the individual are identical. Now Aristotle turns first to another controversy. There are two kinds of virtues: the moral virtues, the virtues of character which are practiced in action, in society; and on the other hand, the virtues of the mind which can be practiced in solitude. Now it is controversial which of these two kinds of virtues is the highest—in other words, whether practical or political life is preferred or rather the contemplative life, that of the philosopher. Now since the end of the city is the same as the end of the individual, this controversy concerns of course the city as well. But how does this alternative look in the case of the city? What is the difficulty for you, Mr. Levy?

**Mr. Levy:** The city doesn't think, Mr. Strauss.

**LS:** Pardon?

<sup>xi</sup> Sam Giancana was allegedly a crime boss in Chicago in the fifties and sixties.

<sup>xii</sup> For Callicles' views in the *Gorgias*, see esp. 483a-c, 490a with 491a-d, 491e-492c.

**Mr. Levy:** The city doesn't think.

**LS:** Well, that could be perhaps too harsh. The city thinks, of course, in and through its government. But . . . it doesn't philosophize.

Now how does the alternative look in the case of the city? We can say, following Aristotle's explanation, practical life means going outward. Extroverted. And this means in the case of the city trying to rule over neighboring cities: expansionism, imperialism. The theoretical argument, on the other hand, is not going outward: theoretical men are introverted. And therefore the political counterpart, the political reflection of that, would be the rejection of imperialism. Aristotle rejects imperialism altogether. The end is peace and not war; in connection with that, not expansion. He admits that happiness consists in action and, to that extent, the practical men seem to be wiser than the theoretical men. But 1325b16:

**Student:**

If we are right in our view, and felicity should be held to consist in "well-doing," it follows that the life of action is best, alike for every state as a whole and for each individual in his own conduct. But the life of action need not be, as is sometimes thought, a life which involves relations to others. Nor should our thoughts be held to be active only when they are directed to objects which have to be achieved by action. Thoughts with no object beyond themselves, and speculations and trains of reflection followed purely for their own sake, are far more deserving of the name of active.<sup>xiii</sup> Action of some sort or other is therefore our end and aim; but, even in the sphere of outward acts, action can also be predicated—and that in the fullest measure and the true sense of the word—of those who, by their thoughts, are the prime authors of such acts.<sup>xiv</sup> States situated by themselves, and resolved to live in isolation—

**LS:** Who cannot have any action on other states—say, on an island, without any connection with another island or mainland—

**Student:**

need not be therefore inactive. They can achieve activity by sections: the different sections of such a state will have many mutual connections.<sup>xv</sup> This is also, and equally, true of the individual human being. If it were not so, there would be something wrong with God himself, and the whole of the universe, who have no activities other than those of their own internal life.

It is therefore clear that the same way of life which is best for the individual must also be best for the state as a whole and for all its members.<sup>xvi</sup>

<sup>xiii</sup> The reader omits the words "'Well-doing' is the end we seek."

<sup>xiv</sup> The reader omits the interpolation "[As thought in itself may be activity, so activity may exist without relation to others.]"

<sup>xv</sup> From here Barker interpolates "[and the whole will thus be active, in its own internal life.]"

<sup>xvi</sup> *Politics* VII.1325b14-32.

**LS:** It is perhaps not quite so clear for every reason. Now what Aristotle says is: action, yes, because it is understood in contradistinction to laziness, to inactivity. But action may remain entirely intrinsic, as in the case of thinking or contemplation, of such thinking as does not concern itself with external goals. [The] thinking of the carpenter is not of course simply intrinsic, because it issues in fabrication, and similarly the action of the statesman. God is essentially active: this Aristotle simply takes over from accepted views. And this activity is according to Aristotle thinking of thinking: thinking thinking itself. No relation to externals. The Aristotelian god is not the biblical God. Here he asserts again the supremacy of the theoretical life, even in regard to the city, but what does it mean in the case of the city? This we have still to understand. Not more than the rejection of expansionist or imperialist policy as such. We draw this conclusion: the city is not capable of theoretical life proper, only an *analogon* of it. And this *analogon* is the city which<sup>3</sup> is entirely concerned with the motions within itself in its own improvement. The end of life of the city is therefore not strictly speaking identical with that of the individual, contrary to Aristotle's explicit assertion. It may be true that a city within which philosophers can live is better than a city within which philosophers cannot live. That may be so, although this is not quite clear, and the proof that it is not quite clear is this. Aristotle, like Plato, preferred the Spartan regime to the Athenian regime. But under the Spartan regime, philosophers were impossible. In the Athenian regime they were possible, although with the danger of ending as Socrates ended. But Socrates lived for seventy years in Athens. The key point is this: however important philosophy may be for Aristotle—and it is of course the most important thing—philosophy or the philosophers are not an essential part of the city. This comes out very beautifully, I think, in the medieval Aristotelian, Marsilius of Padua, who states Aristotle's doctrine as follows. One of the parts of the city is the teachers, something which Aristotle never says, but the teachers are the priests, i.e., not the philosophers. So while it deviates from the letter of Aristotle, something is still in the spirit of Aristotle: philosophy transcends the city.

Now we will come back to this key question again. Aristotle turns then to starting from scratch, trying to build up a good city with a good regime, and he starts like any other craftsman would, from the material, the matter. Now one of the important considerations regarding the material which the founder of a regime must have is numbers: how many inhabitants, how many citizens. He looks for the optimum number, and the answer he gives (we cannot read everything, so I will mention only the main points) is: not more than mutual trust requires. And mutual trust requires mutual knowledge. In other words, differently stated: a city must not be so large that there is not possible mutual supervision. Perhaps by maiden aunts—it doesn't matter who exercises it in particular. But these big Babylons, where everyone can do as he lists, that is not soil for a good regime. Incidentally, this question of size, which became a matter of ridicule in modern times—for example, in Hobbes, who simply says the question of size is irrelevant—that depends on the situation in foreign policy and other accidents, there is not any meaning in questioning it. But with these big *metropoleis* and other phenomena in the mid-twentieth century, it is again shown that the question of an optimal size is a necessary question, naturally, not for the country as a whole so much as for the individual towns. Now as for the internal structure of the best regime, the principle of it is this: not every kind of human being that is indispensable for the city can be a part of the city. For those who

cannot participate in the end of the city but are only means for the city are not properly parts. Needless to say, the parts proper, let us say the government, are also indispensable, but there is a difference between ingredients of the city which are only indispensable and those which are truly parts. What then are the indispensable works or functions of the city, without which there could not be a city? 1328b4:

**Student:**

It remains for us now to enumerate *all* the necessary elements of the city. Our list of these elements will include what we have called the “parts” of the city, as well as what we have termed its “conditions.”<sup>xvii</sup>

**LS:** “Conditions” are what I have termed “indispensable.”

**Student:**

To make such a list, we must first determine how many services a city performs; and then we shall easily see how many elements it must contain. The first thing to be provided is food. The next is arts and crafts; for life is a business which needs many tools. The third is arms: the members of a state must bear arms in person, partly in order to maintain authority and repress disobedience, and partly in order to meet any threat of external aggression. The fourth thing which has to be provided is a certain supply of property, alike for domestic use and for military purposes. The fifth (but, in order of merit, the first)—

**LS:** that is, “the fifth and the first”—

**Student:**

is an establishment for the service of the gods, or, as it is called, public worship. The sixth thing, and the most vitally necessary, is a method of deciding what is demanded by the public interest and what is just in men’s private dealings.<sup>xviii</sup> These are the services which every city may be said to need.

**LS:** “Services” is also not appropriate, but rather “the works, the functions, the deeds.” A service—that has certain un-Aristotelian connotations.

**Student:**

The city is not a mere casual group. It is a group which, as we have said, must be self-sufficient for the purposes of life; and if any of these services is missing it cannot be totally self-sufficient. A city should accordingly be so constituted as to be competent for all these services. It must therefore contain a body of farmers to produce all the necessary food; craftsmen; a military force; a propertied class;

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<sup>xvii</sup> Barker’s translation contains minor differences: “It remains for us now to enumerate all the elements necessary for the existence of the state. Our list of these elements will include what we have called the ‘parts’ of the state as well as what we have termed its ‘conditions.’”

<sup>xviii</sup> The reader omits the interpolation “[i.e. some system of deliberation and jurisdiction].”

priests; and a body for deciding necessary issues and determining what is the public interest.<sup>xix</sup>

**LS:** Literally, “judges of what is necessary and beneficial.” This latter implies both deliberative-legislative and judicial. Now you see here in the enumeration Aristotle starts from bottom to top. What they need most urgently of course is food, and he goes up from that to the highest. This implies that government proper, the deliberative and judicial, is higher than the priesthood or the concern with the divine things. Yet in one sense the concern with the divine things is the highest, as is indicated by this strange expression, “the fifth and the first.” From one point of view the fifth, from another the first. And the reason for the ambiguity is this: that from Aristotle’s point of view the true concern with the divine things is philosophy. The reflection of this true concern is religion, as we say. There is no Greek word for religion, although it offers itself almost inevitably. The word which the Greeks would use more naturally would be “piety,” *eusebeia*. It is very interesting that *eusebeia*, piety, is not mentioned among the virtues in Aristotle’s *Ethics*. Now let us go on from where we left off.

**Student:** “These points determined, a further point is still left for consideration. Should all the members share in the performance of all these services? (That is a possibility: the same persons may all be engaged simultaneously in farming, the practice of arts and crafts, and the work of deliberation and jurisdiction.)”

**LS:** Is this not clear? That while the city needs these various functions, they do not all have to be distributed in different classes. Peasants could be warriors, and could be the majority in the assembly—why not?

**Student:**

Or should we assume a separate body of persons for each of the separate services? Or, again, should some of the services be assigned to different sets of persons, and others be shared by all? The same system need not be followed in every regime. Different systems, as we have noted, are possible: all may share in all functions, or different persons may undertake different functions. The existence of these alternatives explains why constitutions differ: in democracies all men share in all functions, while the opposite practice is followed in oligarchies.

**LS:** This must be reasonably understood. Aristotle does not say that in democracies everyone is both a farmer and an artisan, but he means politically interesting functions, the deliberative and judicial.

**Student:** “Here we are only concerned with the best or ideal regime.”<sup>xx</sup>

**LS:** “Ideal” is also not a Greek word. It was coined in the seventeenth century; it didn’t exist before that. If you wanted, you could say “the regime according to wish or prayer,” meaning of course according to wish or prayer of sensible men. Now how this came to be

<sup>xix</sup> *Politics* VII.1328b2-23.

<sup>xx</sup> Here again the reader has replaced Barker’s “constitution” with “regime.”



called *ideal*, with a word derivative from Plato's "*idea*," is a very long question. I will only say one point to show you the difficulty: that Plato's regime in the *Republic* is not a Platonic idea, it is something made by men. The blueprint is made by men. The man-made blueprint is not an idea proper. What an idea might mean I cannot now discuss. Go on.

**Student:** "Now the best regime is that under which the city can attain the greatest felicity; and that, as we have already stated, cannot exist without goodness. Upon these principles it clearly follows that a state with an ideal regime—a state which has for its members men who are absolutely just, and not men who are merely just in relation to some particular standard—cannot have its citizens living the life of mechanics or shopkeepers, which is ignoble and inimical to goodness."

**LS:** "Goodness" is here *virtue*.

**Student:** "Nor can it have them engaged in farming: leisure is a necessity, both for growth in virtue and for the pursuit of political activities."<sup>xxi</sup>

**LS:** What does he mean by this distinction between justice absolutely understood and justice with a view to hypothesis (to an assumption)? Well, there is a democratic concept of justice, there is an oligarchic concept of justice. These are concepts with regard to an assumption, an assumption which grows up naturally but which on reflection proves to be unsound. Justice simply is that notion of justice which stands the test of examination. So Aristotle makes it quite clear: he excludes farmers and artisans and small traders from citizenship because they lack the leisure and dignity required for life devoted to virtue. In other words, Aristotle's final decision is not democratic. But there are functions which remain: fighting, wealth, priesthood, and government. They must belong to the same men, but in a way different groups, with a view to the natural distinctions of youth, maturity, and old age. That is to say, in their youth, they are fighters; in their maturity, they are governors; in their old age, they are priests. The question we must address to Aristotle after what we have learned from him is: How can you make such a tremendous step, throw out the *dēmos* altogether, after what you told us about the necessity of considering the claims of the *dēmos*? Is this not very strange? How would Aristotle reply to us? Very simple: You only have to read, and while reading, try to think. The best regime is a city without a *dēmos*. There may be slaves around, there must be slaves around—resident aliens, at any rate, unnaturalized citizens. Farming and the crafts are to be exercised by slaves and metics. There is a provision, as Aristotle points out, for the emancipation of slaves, so that if they are not satisfied with their miserable lot, a reward is held out to them and to all slaves, as Aristotle says. Naturally he means it, that if they behave well for a sufficiently long time, they will be emancipated. Clearly this is a great difficulty, because if they can be emancipated, they can take care of themselves: their enslavement was not natural, it was unjust in the first place. This is a major difficulty of Aristotle's construction. Of course, one could say: When you take a general picture of the republic of Venice as it developed, you find traces of what Aristotle says here very clearly. But there we see, as in other Italian cities, a gradual formation of a plebs.

<sup>xxi</sup> *Politics* VII.1328b24-1329a2.

Naturally there are emancipated slaves, and these resident aliens who don't remember anymore whether they came from Sicily or Asia Minor but are as true-born in this particular place as any full-blooded citizen, and what have you then? They are not legally a plebs. They are not recognized to be citizens, but they are human beings and they will be dissatisfied and take action, as human nature is apt to do.

Now what is the consequence? Aristotle knows that, of course. Under these conditions, after some generations, even after some centuries, a *dēmos* has formed itself in that best city. Well, the answer is I think obvious. Either the city makes the necessary adaptation, it ceases to be an aristocracy and becomes a mixture of aristocracy and democracy or, failing that, it will perish, necessarily. This is for Aristotle not such a threat as it would seem to us, because he is permeated by the certainty that every thing which has come into being will perish again—including Karl Marx's "realm of freedom" with all its beauties, which, as we know from the mouth of Engels if not from the mouth of Marx, will perish again. As long as it lasts, the best regime is the best. And we would say: Well, in our own lives as individuals, we also know that we must die, and it does make a difference whether we have lived well or ill while we could. So Aristotle's best regime embodies, then, the simple rejection of democracy—just as of oligarchs, of course—these are not rich people, of course, they are well-to-do, but that is not their main claim: their main claim is virtue, that they are virtuous. That is to say, he rejects that simple schema, democracy [versus] oligarchy, the practical schema based on the actualities of his age, from which he started. Yet the consideration of the superior claim of virtue leads to aristocracy, as we have seen, and eventually to absolute kingship, in the case of a man of outstanding virtue. What happens to absolute kingship at the end of Aristotle's discussion of the best regime? Let us read that: 1332b15.

### Student:

As all political associations are composed of governors and governed, we have to consider whether the two should be distinguished for life, or merged together in a single body. The system of education will necessarily vary according to the answer we give. We may imagine one set of circumstances in which it would be obviously better that a lasting distinction should once and for all be established between governors and governed. This would be if there were one class in the state surpassing all others as much as gods and heroes are supposed to surpass mankind—a class of men so outstanding, physically as well as mentally, that the superiority of the ruling stock was indisputably clear to their subjects. But that is a difficult assumption to make; and we have nothing in actual life like the gulf between kings and subjects which the writer Scylax describes as existing in India. We may therefore draw the conclusion, which can be defended on many grounds, that all should share alike in a system of government under which they rule and are ruled by turns. In a society of peers equality means that all should have the same rights: and a constitution can hardly survive if it is founded on injustice.<sup>xxii</sup> The subject citizens will then be joined by all<sup>xxiii</sup> of the country-side

<sup>xxii</sup> The reader omits the interpolation "[i.e. if it gives different rights to men who are of the same quality]."

<sup>xxiii</sup> Barker interpolates "[the serfs]."

in a common policy of revolution; and the civic body will be too small to cope successfully with all its enemies. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that there should be a difference between governors and governed. How they can differ, and yet share alike, is a dilemma which legislators have to solve. We have already touched on a possible solution in a previous chapter

Nature, we have suggested, has provided us with the distinction we need. She has divided a body of citizens who are all generically the same into two different age-groups, a younger and an older, one of them meant to be governed and the other to act as the government. Youth never resents being governed, or thinks itself better than its governors; and it is all the less likely to do so if it knows that it will take over the government on reaching a proper maturity.<sup>xxiv</sup>

**LS:** Is this a solution to the great difficulty? Absolute kingship and regimes of this kind are possible only if the rulers are manifestly, to everybody, superior to the ruled. No one [among them] ever has glasses<sup>4</sup> or needs any other artificial touches, and they lead a perfectly clean and unimpeachable life, privately and publicly, and they are of superior wisdom. When they decide on a war, one doesn't question whether the war is necessary, for example, but only whether it can be won. But Aristotle says that won't happen. Such a manifest superiority doesn't exist. Even if a man is superior in wisdom and virtue, this superiority is clear only to people who understand something of virtue. And so, for example, no one would say that Winston Churchill, at least when he became older, was a man of outstanding beauty, so that when he appeared all teenagers were thrilled in addition to the members of the House of Lords. In other words, that doesn't exist. And therefore this is a final judgment of absolute kingship, which he had discussed provisionally in Book 3. The utmost we can dare to hope is the rule of equals. Now this means, of course, a special type of men, as we have seen: the exclusion of the lower classes, there is no *dēmos* in this particular society.<sup>5</sup>

Here the question arises: We need a distinction between rulers and ruled, obviously, because not all can rule, and how can it be done fairly? Aristotle says very simply: It is that the ruled, generally speaking, are the young. No one can have access to a ruling office before he is thirty. This is what Aristotle says is the best we can do, and he makes clear later on in the sequel that the absolute kingship of which he spoke in such glowing terms is possible only at the beginning of civil life. The founder—<sup>6</sup> men like Romulus in Rome, Theseus in Athens, and in a way Lycurgus in Sparta—they were men of outstanding, surpassing virtue, and no one begrudged them their power. And we find a repetition of that in new, emergent states, where there is a tendency also to find one man, rather than more, as the father. I don't believe we should bring in psychoanalysis, but ["father"] in the old sense: father of the fathers, the founder.

Now of the utmost importance to the legislator, according to Aristotle, is not the externals, external conditions (although they are very important, and we must discuss that at great length), but the core of his concern is education, the education of the young. The first point which he makes, which is known in a way today in this country but was perhaps not known in traditional political teaching: education must be relative to the

<sup>xxiv</sup> *Politics* VII.1332b12-41.

regime. In other words, if democratic, it must be suited to that; if in an oligarchy, oligarchic, and aristocratic in an aristocracy. This<sup>7</sup> political character of education implies that education must be public. He discusses at great length how babies should be brought up. He goes very far in that, and even prenatal care is carefully considered by Aristotle—even more the good age for spouses. One of the most amazing things in Aristotle, not unamusing, is that he tries to figure out the optimum age of the husband and wife with a view to some end of their generative power,<sup>xxv</sup> so that if they should reach that end simultaneously, they must marry when the husband is thirty-seven and the wife is eighteen. [Laughter] Whether they like that—well, that is a political doctrine and they are not asked. The arbitrary wills of individuals do not originate that. He really figures it out very neatly.

Now we come back to the most important question, that of education. It must be public. In an aristocracy—and of course, Aristotle is here concerned with an aristocracy—education will be liberal. Today, “liberal” is used almost synonymously with “democratic,” not to say “extreme democratic.” This is understandable today, but it cannot be viewed so with Aristotle. “Liberal” means free from all the slavishness to which our flesh is heir. Education would be education in the liberal arts: Aristotle mentions reading, writing, gymnastics, music, and drawing. Now he knows that some of them, like reading and writing, are also good for utilitarian purposes—business and your transactions with your neighbors—but this is not the key point. The key point is that we begin to think in worthwhile and not in monetary terms. Education must train the young for both business and leisure, but the end is leisure, not business. Now here is a point which has frequently been forgotten in modern times. Aristotle makes a distinction between leisure and relaxation. Relaxation is of course for the sake of business. We relax in order to be at our job tomorrow morning, and hence relaxation is subordinate to business whereas business itself is subordinate to leisure. And man, if his business is not for the sake of his leisure, is a kind of slave.

A German philosopher of the present time, [. . .],<sup>xxvi</sup> has made this very sound remark for understanding this thought of Aristotle’s.<sup>8</sup> How is leisure time, or some kind of leisure time, still called in ordinary sensible language? Holidays. And what does holidays originally mean?

**Student:** Holy days.

**LS:** Holy days. And what do you do on holy days? You devote them to the contemplation of and devotion to the holy, and this is of course superior to business. And one of our difficulties today is that we cannot find a substitute for holy days. It is in another way the same problem we have regarding the question of a substitute for war. Now Aristotle says the leisure of the gentlemen must be devoted to such things as conversation among them and enjoyment of music, poetry, painting, and such matters. Now this is higher than what they do in the marketplace. It consists in the common sharing, through speaking,

<sup>xxv</sup> *Politics* VII.1334a29-1335b1.

<sup>xxvi</sup> The transcript has a blank space here. Strauss may be referring to Josef Pieper, *Leisure, The Basis of Culture*, trans. Alexander Dru (London: Faber & Faber, 1952).

listening, and seeing, of the beautiful things, not in doing the beautiful things—that they do in battle or in the marketplace—but in speaking, listening, and seeing. We can also say here again that the leisure activity of the gentlemen is again a reflection of the theoretical life. In their way—not too impressive a way, but in their way these gentlemen devote their leisure to the contemplation of the beautiful.

Now Aristotle's presentation of the best regime in Books 7 and 8 can be dismissed, in the spirit of Machiavelli, as the presentation of an imagined or imaginary commonwealth—wholly impractical. Aristotle doesn't give any indication that there ever was such a best regime. Certain particular ingredients, yes—the whole, never. He himself never claims that it was actual anywhere, anytime. Yet he claims that it is possible: there is no intrinsic impossibility of a society of well-bred and public-spirited men. This is not fantastic because it does not exclude the appearance here and there of some black sheep—every family has its black sheep here and there—provided the black sheep are treated as black sheep, and then nothing happens. I mean, if they are given the same respect as the white sheep, then there would be problems. And such a society of well-bred and public-spirited men is the good society. We can still defend it if we make one assumption: the assumption of an economy of scarcity. This assumption was in fact made, and necessarily so, by everyone until a very short time ago. In an economy of scarcity only a very small part of the population has the possibility of becoming educated in a politically relevant sense. I mean not merely learning the law which was transmitted from generation to generation, but to enable them to act wisely, and no sensible man can wish the rule of the uneducated who are more likely than not to become the prey of fanatical rabble-rousers and the lot. Aristotle would deserve blame only if he had neglected to pay attention to the actual regimes, however imperfect, and this he surely did not.

And now I turn to the subject of the central books of the *Politics*, Books 4 to 6. But before I go on, is there anything which you wish to clarify? Is the connection of the discussion in Books 7 and 8 to that in Books 2 and 3 clear? Because that is in a way the nerve of the whole book. Well, we go on.

Now at the end of Book 3 we are directed in one way to Books 7 and 8 by the fact that the last sentence of Book 3 is identical to the first sentence of Book 7. By the mere order as the manuscripts have it, we are otherwise directed from Book 3 to Books 4 and 6, and these are the books which do not deal with the best regime.<sup>9</sup>

May I sit down? Mr. Bruell. Thank you. The beginning of Book 4, and omit Barker's insertions.

**Mr. Bruell:**

There is a rule which applies to all the practical arts and sciences, when they have come to cover the whole of a subject, and are no longer engaged in investigating it bit by bit. Each of them severally has to consider the different methods appropriate to the different categories of its subject. For instance, the art of physical training has to consider (1) which type of training is appropriate to

which type of physique; (2) which is the best<sup>xxvii</sup> type of training—i.e. the training best for a physique of the best endowment and the best equipment (for the best<sup>xxviii</sup> type of training must be suitable for such a physique); and (3) which is the type of training that can be generally applied to the majority of physiques—for that too is one of the problems to be solved by the art of physical training. Nor is this all. (4) There may be men who want to have physical training, but do not want to attain the standard of skill and condition which is needed for competitions; and here the trainer and gymnastic master have still another duty—to impart the degree of capacity which is all that such men want. What is true of the art of physical training is obviously no less true of medicine, or of shipbuilding, tailoring, and all the other arts

It follows that the study of politics<sup>xxix</sup> must be equally comprehensive. First, it has to consider which is the best constitution, and what qualities a constitution must have to come closest to the ideal when there are no external factors<sup>xxx</sup> to hinder its doing so.

**LS:** In other words, the best might not always be possible, and for some people the best regime might be bad. The best form of physical training might be bad for a sick man, so you have to adapt the regime to the people concerned.

**Mr. Bruell:**

Secondly, politics has to consider which sort of constitution suits which sort of civic body. The attainment of the best regime is likely to be impossible for the general run of states; and the good law-giver and the true statesman must therefore have their eyes open not only to what is the absolute best, but also to what is the best in relation to actual conditions. Thirdly, politics has also to consider the sort of regime which depends upon an assumption. In other words, the student of politics must also be able to study a *given* constitution, just as it stands and simply with a view to explaining how it may have arisen and how it may be made to enjoy the longest possible life.

**LS:** The question is not: Is it the best regime for these people? but rather: What is the established regime? This alone has a true equivalent in present-day political science. Then the question arises: How can this be preserved?

**Mr. Bruell:**

The sort of case which we have in mind is one where a state has neither the ideally best regime (or even the elementary conditions needed for it) nor the best regime possible under the actual conditions, but has only a regime of an inferior type. Fourthly, and in addition to all these functions, politics has also to provide a knowledge of the type of regime which is best suited to cities<sup>xxxi</sup> in general. Most

<sup>xxvii</sup> In the place of “best” Barker has “ideal.”

<sup>xxviii</sup> Barker has “ideal.”

<sup>xxix</sup> Barker interpolates “[which belongs to the practical arts and sciences].”

<sup>xxx</sup> Barker inserts the interpolation “[e.g. want of means, or unequal distribution of means].”

<sup>xxxi</sup> In the place of “cities” Barker writes “states.”

of the writers who treat of politics—good as they may be in other respects—fail when they come to deal with matters of practical *utility*. We have not only to study the<sup>xxxii</sup> best regime. We have also to study the type of regime which is practicable—<sup>xxxiii</sup>

LS: “Feasible.”

Mr. Bruell:

and with it, and equally, the type which is easiest to work and most suitable to states generally. As things are, writers fall into two different classes. Some confine their investigations to the extreme of perfection, which requires a large equipment.<sup>xxxiv</sup> The rest, addressing themselves rather to an attainable form, still banish from view the general range of existing regimes, and simply extol the Spartan or some other *one* regime. The sort of political<sup>xxxv</sup> system which ought to be proposed is one which men can be easily induced, and will be readily able, to graft onto the system they already have. It is as difficult a matter to reform an old constitution as it is to construct a new one; as hard to unlearn a lesson as it was to learn it initially.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

LS: Let us stop here. Aristotle raises here the claim, you see, that if political science is the study of regimes, he is the founder of this discipline . . . because prior to him people were concerned only with the best, say, Plato, or they were enamored of one particular regime, say, Sparta, and praised the Spartans. But a true scientific, theoretical approach comprehends all regimes at least in principle; and that was not attempted by anyone, at least before him. Now in this respect Aristotle’s notion of political science agrees with the notion of political science now prevailing. No kind of political or social organization must be disregarded; some may not be terribly important, but in principle they all are within the province of political science. But what is the difference<sup>10</sup> [between] Aristotle’s broad concept of political science and the positivistic concept? Yes?

Student: Well, the study of regimes is still ordered by the possibility, at least in thought, of a best regime, which would have certain features, and which other regimes would be more or less similar to.

LS: Yes. In other words, there is an order of rank among regimes—that is absolutely essential—and something else connected with that. Fundamentally, Aristotle’s political science, as indicated by what he says, is guided by a practical intent: it addresses people who wish to establish a regime and teaches them how to go about it. It is not simply theoretical. Perhaps we may go on from where we left off.

<sup>xxxii</sup> The word “ideally” is here inserted in the Barker translation.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> The translation includes the interpolation “[i.e. the best for a state under actual conditions].”

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Barker interpolates “[of initial advantages].”

<sup>xxxv</sup> In the place of “political” Barker writes “constitutional.”

<sup>xxxvi</sup> *Politics* IV.1288b10-1289a5.

**Mr. Bruell:** “The true statesman, therefore, must not confine himself to the matters we have just mentioned the study of the best regime, or that of some one particular form such as the Spartan.”<sup>xxxvii</sup> he must also be able, as we said previously, to help *any* existing regime along the path of reform.<sup>xxxviii</sup> He cannot do so unless he knows how many different<sup>xxxix</sup> regimes there are. As things are, we find people believing that there is only one sort of democracy or oligarchy. This is an error.”<sup>xl</sup>

**LS:** So Aristotle, loyal to his scientific intent, wants to have a detailed discussion of all regimes, and preferably of those which are his main interest, democracy and oligarchy. But here we have to do one thing, which is the first step that Aristotle takes: never forget that democracy means a *variety* of regimes, and so does oligarchy. In other words, in our language of today: no abstractness, no schemas. We have to look at each kind of democracy, we must in fact find out if it makes sense to bring these various kinds together under one heading; otherwise, it would be a misleading term. Now [in] Books 4 to 6, the central books, these are the regimes other than the best—the best being aristocracy (Books 7 and 8) and kingship, which is, however, almost a will-o’-the-wisp. What is the reason for the variety of regimes? Aristotle raises this question again. He doesn’t leave it at the fact of the variety, which no one can deny, but why is it so, why is it necessary? The reason for the variety of regimes is the fact that the city necessarily consists of a number of parts: farmers, artisans, etc. According to the preponderance of one or the other part, there is a variety of regimes. There will always be a preponderance of some part or a combination of parts, and this preponderant thing gives the regime its character. He enumerates these parts again: farmers, artisans, traders, manual workers, fighters, judges, deliberators. (Deliberators means always legislators, as we said before.) Some of these parts may be combined, for example, the farmers may be fighters, without any difficulty. But where does the difficulty arise? I don’t believe we have time to read—yes, this is of some interest: 1291a33. There is one part which he had not enumerated as such.<sup>xli</sup> “The seventh part . . . .”

**Mr. Bruell:** “The seventh part is the group composed of the rich, who serve the city with their property. The eighth part is the magistrates, who serve the state in its offices. No city can exist without a government—”

**LS:** Without magistrates, he means here.

**Mr. Bruell:**

and there must therefore be persons capable of discharging the duties of office and rendering the state that service, permanently or in rotation. There only remain the two parts which have just been mentioned in passing—the deliberative part, and the part which decides on the rights of litigants. These are parts which ought

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Barker interpolates “[the study of the ideally best constitution, or that of some one particular form such as the Spartan].”

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Barker presents “[along the path of reform]” as an interpolation.

<sup>xxxix</sup> The reader omits “kinds of.”

<sup>xl</sup> *Politics* IV.1289a5-11.

<sup>xli</sup> Aristotle fails to enumerate the sixth member of his list.



to exist in all cities, and to exist on a good and just basis; and this demands persons of a good quality in matters political.<sup>xlii</sup> The different capacities belonging to the other parts may, it is generally held, be shown by one and the same group of persons.<sup>xliii</sup>

**LS:** In other words, the farmer may be a fighting man, a member of the deliberative assembly, and he may even have a trade of sorts. But one thing is absolutely impossible, one combination, namely, what he speaks about now.

**Mr. Bruell:** “The same persons cannot be both rich and poor.”

**LS:** This combination is evidently impossible. And the consequence is what?

**Mr. Bruell:** “This will explain why these two classes—the rich and the poor—are regarded as parts of the state in a special and peculiar sense. Nor is this all. One of these classes being small, and the other large, they also appear to be *opposite* parts. This is why they both form regimes to suit their own interest.<sup>xliiv</sup> It is also the reason why men think there are only two regimes—democracy and oligarchy.”<sup>xlv</sup>

**LS:** This popular prejudice that there are only two regimes has a respectable reason—not sufficient, however—the argument being the incompatibility of being rich and poor on the part of the same man, therefore two parts of the city. Now this is a crude view, but not groundless. As Aristotle states in the sequel, it is simply not good enough. And the chief reason is that there are various kinds of democracies and oligarchies; and this he develops at length afterwards. We will discuss it at length next time. In both democracy and oligarchy there is a preferred type—in other words, a democracy which is relatively close to oligarchy, and an oligarchy which is relatively close to democracy. The two diverge otherwise, and each becomes worse and worse. And the preferred type of democracy is the rural democracy. The majority of the citizens are farmers, who don’t like to come to town every day and can’t afford it, and are perfectly satisfied if they have the right to vote, as we would call it—not the right to judge or to legislate—and leave these matters more or less to gentlemen of their trust. Nevertheless, it is a democracy because those to whom everyone in the city, regardless of how high they are, remain responsible are the citizen body without practically any property qualification.

We will take up other questions regarding democracy. I would like to draw your attention now to one part of this central section, and that is Book 5, devoted to changes of regime or, as people frequently call it, revolution. This is one of the most “realistic” parts of Aristotle’s *Politics*. But let us never forget that which is so minimized in part of the popular literature: however realistic Aristotle may be, he clings to the notion of his teacher Plato that there is and must be a best regime, in the light of which political judgments alone can ultimately be justified. And it is not important whether this regime is

<sup>xlii</sup> The interpolation “[Here we begin to confront a difficulty]” is omitted.

<sup>xliii</sup> *Politics* IV.1291a33-b3.

<sup>xliiv</sup> Barker interpolates “[that of wealth in the one case, and that of numbers in the other].”

<sup>xlv</sup> IV.1291b7-13.

actual, or has been or will be actual, it must be possible in deed. On the other hand, Aristotle never forgets the fact that most of the time we are concerned with imperfect regimes, and we have to have had a[s] good and close an understanding of the imperfect regimes as possible. But precisely if we want to have a good understanding of imperfect regimes, we must know that they are imperfect, as part of the fact, just as to know that a man who suffers from angina pectoris is sick is part of the fact of his being at that time. Diseases, decay, corruption—these are all factual things and don't have to be mentioned in quotation marks but as we do it in everyday life, without quotation marks. There are dubious cases, where one hesitates to say whether there was corruption or decay, but in which field of studies are there not borderline cases? That is no objection per se.

Now is there any point any one of you would like to take up? Failing that, I will remind you of the fact that if everything goes well, we will have our last class next Monday, and the following Wednesday . . . you will be compelled to reveal your mental nakedness.<sup>xlvi</sup>  
[Laughter]

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<sup>1</sup> Deleted "As therefore."

<sup>2</sup> Deleted "they."

<sup>3</sup> Deleted "has."

<sup>4</sup> Moved "among them."

<sup>5</sup> Deleted "Now Aristotle."

<sup>6</sup> Deleted "well."

<sup>7</sup> Deleted "implies, this."

<sup>8</sup> Deleted "Now."

<sup>9</sup> Deleted "The spirit of these books."

<sup>10</sup> Deleted "of."

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<sup>xlvi</sup> Note the allusion to *Charmides* 154d.

**Session 15: March 10, 1965**

**Leo Strauss:** To continue Aristotle's argument regarding the best regime, we turn to the statement at the beginning of Book 4, where Aristotle gives a broad outline of the scope of political science as a whole. He makes it clear beyond the shadow of a doubt that political science must be greatly concerned with imperfect regimes, which means in simple language with actual regimes, and with special emphasis on democracy and oligarchy. There he takes issue with the crude view that there is only the alternative of democracy or oligarchy, but he adds that this popular view is not entirely groundless, that there is a kind of tendency of the city to be either democratic or oligarchic. But still, this is not enough, one reason being that there are various kinds of democracies and oligarchies. And at this point we may begin, 1291b14.

**Student:**

The fact that there are a number of constitutions, and the causes of that fact, have already been established. We may now go on to say that there are also a number of varieties of two of these constitutions—democracy and oligarchy. This is already clear from what has been said.<sup>i</sup> These two regimes vary because the people (*dēmos*) and the class called the notables vary. So far as the people are concerned, one sort is engaged in farming; the<sup>ii</sup> second sort is engaged in the arts and crafts; and the<sup>iii</sup> third is the marketing sort, which is engaged in buying and selling; a fourth is the maritime sort, which in turn is partly naval, partly mercantile, partly employed on ferries, partly engaged in fisheries.<sup>iv</sup> A fifth sort is composed of unskilled laborers and persons whose means are so small that they cannot enjoy any leisure.<sup>v</sup>

**LS:** No, this is another kind in addition to those mentioned.

**Student:** “A sixth consists of those who are not of free birth by two citizen parents; and there may be others of a similar character.”<sup>vi</sup> The notables fall into different sorts according to wealth, birth, merit, culture, and other qualities of the same order.”<sup>vii</sup>

**LS:** In other words, if there should be any other kinds of the *dēmos*, of common people, or of the notables, for that matter, that could easily be inserted into the Aristotelian

<sup>i</sup> Barker has “from what has been previously said [at the beginning of the previous chapter].”

<sup>ii</sup> The indefinite “a” is used in Barker.

<sup>iii</sup> Barker counts this subdivision of the people indefinitely as “a” third; “and” is not in Barker.

<sup>iv</sup> The reader omits this passage: “(We may note that there are many places where one of these subdivisions forms a considerable body; as the fishermen do at Tarentum and Byzantium, the naval crews at Athens, the merchant seamen in Aegina and Chios, and the ferrymen at Tenedos.)”

<sup>v</sup> A comparison with Barker shows minor differences. “A fifth sort is composed of unskilled laborers and persons whose means are too small to enable them to enjoy any leisure.”

<sup>vi</sup> The exact wording in Barker is “and there may also be other sorts of a similar character.”

<sup>vii</sup> *Politics* IV.1291b14-30.

scheme without creating any theoretical problem. Now Aristotle, as will appear later, preferred the rule of *dēmos*, on a variety of grounds. One very important one is that they [the common people], live upstate, so to speak, and they cannot come so conveniently to the assembly<sup>1</sup> and they don't have too frequent assemblies, and they are in the main satisfied if they can elect and audit the magistrates and similar things. They simply have no time for that. Also, a consideration is that they are regarded as the better soldiers, which is for every political society important. This view, that the peasantry is the best soldiery, prevailed I think up to the First World War, and there it proved for the first time that the industrial workers could be at least as good if not better soldiers than the rural workers. That of course has to do with technology, which I have referred to frequently, which introduced a radical change into politics. But there is here a complication, which we also must consider in 1292b11. I give you these examples in order to show how broad the Aristotelian scheme of inquiry is.

### Student:

These are the several varieties of oligarchy and democracy. It should be noted, however, that in actual life, it is often the case that constitutions which are not legally democratic are made to work democratically by the habits and training of the people. Conversely, there are other cases where the legal regime is inclined toward democracy, but is made by training and habits to work in a way which inclines more toward oligarchy. This happens particularly after a revolution. The citizens do not change their temper immediately; and in the first stages the triumphant party is content to leave things largely alone, without taking<sup>viii</sup> any great advantage of its opponents. So the old laws remain in force, even though the party of the revolution is actually in power.<sup>ix</sup>

LS: In other words, in order to see and understand a regime properly, we cannot limit ourselves to observing the laws, say, the written constitution. We also must consider the habits of the people. There may be a habitual deference to the notables, [those] of great political importance, which doesn't find any legal expression. So what is meant very frequently by the contribution of a political sociology which looks at the actual society as distinguished from the legal-political arrangement is for Aristotle a matter of course. There is another point of this nature to consider, at 1293b14. He speaks there of a polity which looks at wealth, virtue, and the *dēmos*, as in Carthage. This is aristocratic. Note "aristocracy" is here used in this whole discussion of the Fourth Book in a popular sense, not a strict sense. In other words, the kinds of regimes which are called by the people aristocratic.

### Student:

Accordingly a constitution which takes account of<sup>x</sup> all three factors—wealth, virtue, and numbers—as the Carthaginian does, may be called an aristocratic

<sup>viii</sup> Barker has "without seeking to take."

<sup>ix</sup> Barker: "The result is that the old laws remain in force, even though the party of revolution is actually in power." *Politics* IV.1292b11-21.

<sup>x</sup> In the place of "takes account of" Barker has "pays regard to."

regime; and the same may also be said of constitutions, such as the Spartan, which pay regard only to the two factors of goodness and numbers—

**LS:** Well, let us say, “virtue and the *dēmos*”—

**Student:** “and where there is thus a mixture of the democratic and the aristocratic principle.<sup>xi</sup> We may—”

**LS:** That is all we need. In order to understand this more fully, let us turn to 1294b7: “As it seems to be democratic that the magistracies are elected by lot.”<sup>xii</sup>

**Student:**

In the appointment of magistrates, for example, the use of the lot is regarded as democratic, and the use of the vote as oligarchical. Again, it is considered to be democratic that a property qualification should not be required, and oligarchical that it should be. Here, accordingly, the mode appropriate to an aristocracy<sup>xiii</sup> or a “polity” is to take one form from one regime<sup>xiv</sup> and another from another—<sup>xv</sup> to take from oligarchy the rule that magistrates should be appointed by vote, and from democracy the rule that no property qualification should be required.<sup>xvi</sup>

**LS:** Democracy strictly understood, insisting on equality, would like to make all offices available by lot, because only if they are made available by lot is there a serious chance for every citizen, however humble, to become a magistrate because if they are elected as individuals, we look at merit.<sup>2</sup> We may be mistaken as to what constitutes merit, but the principle is this: not everyone who has the right to vote as a citizen is therefore fit to be a magistrate. An undemocratic, unequalitarian thought. And I think it is also clear that property qualification is incompatible with democracy and is a necessity in an oligarchy. Then an aristocracy in the vulgar sense needs to take institutions from both sides: from oligarchy, the appointment of magistrates by election; and from democracy, no property qualification. From this I think you see immediately that modern democracy is a mixture of democracy and oligarchy or, more precisely, is an aristocracy in the common or vulgar sense of the term. We must keep this in mind in order not to think that Aristotle’s criticism of democracy is unfair. Modern democracy has taken care of many of Aristotle’s objections. And now there is another consideration, indicated at the beginning of page 180.

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<sup>xi</sup> *Politics* IV.1293b14-18.

<sup>xii</sup> A more literal translation than Barker’s, which follows.

<sup>xiii</sup> Barker interpolates “[of the mixed sort].”

<sup>xiv</sup> In the place of “one form from one regime” Barker has “one element from one form of constitution.”

<sup>xv</sup> The reader omits “that is to say.”

<sup>xvi</sup> *Politics* IV.1294b7-13.

**Student:** “We have now to consider what is the best regime and the best way of life for the *majority* of cities and men. In doing so we shall not employ<sup>xvii</sup> a standard of excellence above the reach of ordinary men—”

**LS:** In other words, not that standard which Aristotle employed in describing *the* best regime in Books 6, 7, and 8.

**Student:** “or a standard of education requiring exceptional endowments and equipment.<sup>xviii</sup> We shall only be concerned with the standard of life which most men are able to share and the sort of regime which is possible for most people.”<sup>xix</sup>

**LS:** This is one important consideration for political science to find out: which regime not absolutely is best, but is the best which one can expect under ordinary circumstances.

**Student:** “The ‘aristocracies,’ so called, of which we have just been treating—”<sup>xx</sup>

**LS:** The so-called [aristocracies are those which]<sup>3</sup> are generally regarded as aristocracies, even though they are not so in the strict, Aristotelian, sense.

**Student:**

either lie, at one extreme, beyond the reach of most states, or they approach, at the other, so closely to the regime called “polity,” that they need not be considered separately.<sup>xxi</sup> The issues we have just raised can all be decided in the light of one body of fundamental principles. If we adopt as true the statements made in the *Ethics*—(1) that a truly happy life is a life of goodness free from impediments, and (2) that goodness consists in a mean—it follows that the best way of life is one which attains the mean.<sup>xxii</sup> Further, the same criteria which determine whether the citizen-body<sup>xxiii</sup> have a good or bad way of life must also apply to the regime; for a regime is the way of life of a citizen-body. In all cities there may be distinguished three parts<sup>xxiv</sup> of the citizen body—the very rich; the very poor; and the middle class which forms the mean. Now it is admitted, as a general principle, that moderation and the mean are the<sup>xxv</sup> best. We may therefore conclude that in the ownership of all gifts of fortune a middle condition will be the best. Men who

<sup>xvii</sup> The reader omits the interpolation “[for the purpose of measuring ‘the best’].”

<sup>xviii</sup> Barker’s translation contains the insertion “or the standard of a constitution which attains an ideal height.”

<sup>xix</sup> Here is the exact wording in Barker. “We shall only be concerned with the sort of life which most men are able to share and the sort of constitution which it is possible for most states to enjoy.”

<sup>xx</sup> Barker interpolates “[will not serve us for this purpose: they].”

<sup>xxi</sup> The reader omits “and must be treated as identical with it.”

<sup>xxii</sup> Barker has “it follows that the best way of life [for the *majority* of men] is one which consists in a mean, and a mean of the kind attainable by every individual.”

<sup>xxiii</sup> Inserted here in Barker is the interpolation “[i.e. all its members, considered as *individuals*].”

<sup>xxiv</sup> Barker adds “or classes.”

<sup>xxv</sup> In the place of “the” Barker has “always.”

are in this condition are the most ready to listen to reason. Therefore men<sup>xxvi</sup> who belong to either extreme—the over-handsome, the over-strong, the over-noble, the over-wealthy; or the opposite,<sup>xxvii</sup> the over-poor, the over-weak, the utterly ignoble—find it hard to follow the lead of reason. Men in the first class tend to violence:<sup>xxviii</sup> and men in the second tend too much to roguery and petty offenses; and most wrongdoing arises either from violence or roguery.<sup>xxix</sup>

LS: “Violence” is perhaps not the best word: “from insolence,” insolence bred by great power, wealth, and so on. There can be crime arising from insolence, from a feeling of being superior to others, and there can be crime or defects which stem from feeling that you are an underdog, and this has more to do with petty crime. This one sentence was not translated literally enough: “the regime is some kind of way of life of the city.” Or as Isocrates, orator of Plato’s time, put it: the regime is the soul of the city, that which gives it its life and its character. And the reason is that the regime indicates what the end is for which the society is dedicated, and at the same time it indicates the men most akin to that goal, so that in an oligarchy, based on wealth, the men who rule are most akin to that goal: the wealthy. And if it is virtue, the same would follow. The answer to Aristotle’s question: What is the best regime on the average? is then one which is the rule of the middle class. Now in the sequel he makes clear that it is not necessary that the middle class be the majority, which is sometimes possible perhaps, but the main point is that it can tip the balance, so that by either joining with the lower class against the higher class, or vice versa, it is in fact in control. And the proof of the superiority of the middle class, a popular proof: he notes the fact that the most celebrated legislators, men like Solon and Lycurgus, were middle-class men. “Middle-class” does not mean bourgeois, “bourgeois” is a name for a certain kind of middle class which arose in modern times.

To mention this in passing, the notion of the bourgeois arose in contradistinction to that of the citizen in Rousseau, who makes it clear they are two different things. “The bourgeois” simply meant at that time the average denizens of the city, the burghers, especially under the French monarchy.<sup>4</sup> Of course, these men were entirely powerless and led an absolutely private life, whereas the citizen—as Rousseau, restating the ancient use, said<sup>5</sup>—is a man who leads a political life. Now this was taken up by Hegel, who accepted the Rousseauian distinction and defines the bourgeois by fear of violent death. The Hobbesian origin of the term is obvious, meaning they are not soldiers, they do not fight for their country. The fighting was done either by the hereditary nobility or by the scum of the country forced into the army. The citizen is a man who fights for his country and who is an active participant in political power. And the Marxian use of “bourgeois” is simply a modification necessitated by Marx’s so-called economic interpretation.

This middle-class regime which Aristotle favors is rare, because in most cities, the middle class is not in this beautiful position that it can determine the way. Either the rich or the poor preponderate. Now in the sequel Aristotle makes clear that not every regime

<sup>xxvi</sup> In the place of “therefore men” Barker has “those.”

<sup>xxvii</sup> Barker translates “or at the opposite end.”

<sup>xxviii</sup> Barker: “Men in the first class tend more to violence and serious crime.”

<sup>xxix</sup> *Politics* IV.1295a25-b11.

is possible everywhere. What is the chief condition of the possibility of a given regime? Answer: those who wish the preservation of the regime must be stronger than those who wish to destroy it. “Stronger” does not necessarily mean “more numerous,” because we know it depends partly on the state of armaments and also on other things, what is strength in any actual contest. Finally, as far as this part of the argument is concerned, Aristotle points out that in the study of regimes, we must look of course at the meaning of institutions, not merely at their appearance.

**Student:** “The devices adopted in regimes for fobbing the masses off with sham rights are five in number. They relate to the assembly; the magistracies; the law courts; the possession of arms; and the practice of athletics. As regards the assembly, all alike are allowed to attend; but fines for non-attendance are either imposed on the rich alone, or imposed on the rich at a far higher rate. As regards the magistracies, those who possess a property qualification are not allowed to decline office on oath, but the poor are allowed to do so.”<sup>xxx</sup>

**LS:** You see, this looks very friendly to the common people: they are not compelled to take up the burden of magistracy, but they may decline it. But the rich are forbidden to decline it. And reflection shows that this is, of course, an antidemocratic measure. So in order to understand political institutions properly, we must not merely listen to the wording of law, we must look at its exact meaning. Again, where sociological considerations are regarded as higher than political considerations in modern times, the latter means “merely *legal* considerations,” and the merely legal considerations can be quite deceptive. I remember reading an article by an anti-communist who praised the Soviet Constitution of 1936 (“What a wonderful thing that is”) without ever raising the question of whether it had any probability of becoming in any way practical. One can leave it at that. Let us turn now to more detailed things.

**Student:**

We have now to treat of the next subject,<sup>xxxi</sup> and we have to do so both in general terms and separately for each regime. We must first find a proper basis for the treatment of the subject. We may lay it down that there are three elements, or “powers,” in each regime, and that a good legislator<sup>xxxii</sup> must consider what is expedient for it under each of these three heads. If all of them are constructed properly, the whole regime too will be constructed properly; and where they are constructed differently, regimes will also differ. The first of the three is the deliberative element concerned with common affairs, and its proper constitution: the second is the element of the magistracies (and here it has to be settled what these magistracies are to be, what matters they are to control, and how their occupants are to be appointed); the third is the judicial element, and the proper constitution of that element.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

<sup>xxx</sup> *Politics* IV.1297a14-21.

<sup>xxxi</sup> The reader omits the interpolation [i.e. the proper method of establishing constitutions].”

<sup>xxxii</sup> Barker interpolates “[in establishing a constitution].”

<sup>xxxiii</sup> *Politics* IV.1297b35-1298a3.



**LS:** Is this distinction known to you: the deliberative, the magistrative, and the judiciary? Obviously it is known, but in its Aristotelian meaning? What Aristotle has in mind is not a separation of powers, he makes a *distinction* of powers. Well, we cannot speak of powers, he says “parts,” and of course, the same as in the modern view, the first is the deliberative, which includes legislative. Then what is now called “executive” is not called this by Aristotle, but “magistracies.” What is wrong, [or misleading], with the term “executive”?<sup>6</sup> . . . Because the execution of the laws, simply, is a narrow view—not all magistrates execute laws. Locke, as you know very well, spoke of another power, the federative power. That has to do with foreign affairs and also with warfare in particular. And that the power of a general is, during war, not properly to be called executive unless you say he is given a command to invade the continent of Europe, as Eisenhower in this respect executed orders. But still, one cannot call it the execution of a law, and therefore “magistrates” is a broader term, generals being an outstanding form of magistrates in the Aristotelian sense. But this is not sufficient. What is the reason behind the fact that in Aristotle we find a distinction of powers, whereas in Montesquieu we find the doctrine of the separation of powers?

**Student:** Is it because the deliberative power is, in essence, the final power?

**LS:** Yes, but not quite, because<sup>7</sup> after all, if you are condemned by a judge, the law supplies only the major of the syllogism. But that you are the one who did these things, the minor of the syllogism, is not given by the law. That is to be found by the judge. The judicial power, as well as the power of the magistrate, cannot be reduced. The only point is that the deliberative power or function is the highest power. In that respect there is perfect agreement between Aristotle and the American Constitution, and of course also Montesquieu. But what is the difference between the Aristotelian doctrine of distinction of powers and Montesquieu in the doctrine of separation of powers?

**Student:** Whether or not the powers can be separated depends on the kind of regime with which you are dealing. In rule by philosophy, you wouldn’t want a separation—

**LS:** Well, one could say this is an extreme case<sup>8</sup> which we as hardheaded political scientists might disregard.

**Same student:** In any case, it still would require a different sort of—you might not want to separate all three.

**LS:** Yes, but what is Montesquieu’s solution to that?

**Student:** Whether or not you want a limited government?

**LS:** I believe it has something to do with that.

**Student:** The Aristotelian purpose is to distinguish between who should properly be carrying out the functions, for whom it is more appropriate . . .

**LS:** That is not the purpose. The purpose is that in fact there are three different functions and that these different functions are differently employed in different regimes.

**Same student:** I was going to say that you might go to Aristotle's conception of an organic society. You might analogize the parts of the body, each of which has separate functions, but they are not really separate.

**LS:** No, I don't believe this would be helpful. It is very dangerous to speak of "organic" in these matters because of the vagueness, and I would think one should try to avoid it if possible unless compelled by the text.

**Student:** I thought the separation of powers depended on the distinction between state and society—

**LS:** Yes, you can say that, but what does that distinction mean? . . . Well, to say it very simply . . . Yes?

**Student:** The purpose of separation of powers is to have a group of governing bodies that will check each other—

**Student:** It protects the society from the state.

**LS:** That was already said before. . . . You see, we do not *know* what society is, we take that for granted. We explain an unknown by an unknown. Although colloquially that is always good, but from time to time we should not speak colloquially. Yes?

**Student:** In separation of powers, the assumption is that man is not really a social animal but he's out for his own good. It is a device to keep things going in that case. But with a distinction, it is the function that is important. You might find it in the same person or in different people.

**LS:** You started very well, but by your additional remarks you covered up the good beginning. Montesquieu's overriding<sup>9</sup> interest in this famous discussion in the eleventh book is the security for the individual, and this means society in contradistinction to the state is only a consequence of that.<sup>xxxiv 10</sup>—Mr. Bruell, will you allow me?

Now to make that a bit clearer, because it is, I think, of some importance: Montesquieu's presentation is given in a quasi-historical form—I mean, not in general theoretical terms. He speaks of the British constitution. Now this description of the British constitution is modeled on a description of the Roman constitution given by the historian Polybius, a Greek familiar with Rome, in the second century. Polybius also speaks, sometimes very much reminding of Montesquieu, of something like checks and balances between the consuls, the Senate, and the popular assemblies. That is the crucial difference . . . and this political thought falls easily within the Aristotelian framework although it is not explicitly stated in Aristotle. But what is the key point? Very crudely stated: power may

<sup>xxxiv</sup> The "eleventh book" sc. of Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws*.

be misused and therefore it must be checked. The sum total of political power must be split up. This is common to Polybius and Montesquieu, but for Polybius there is no other principle involved. Polybius' checks and balances has nothing to do with the Aristotelian division of powers. As it were, the sum total of political power is divided into three big chunks, and how we draw the line does not make any difference: the main point is that every part, whether the consul or the Senate or the common people, have an important function but a limited part of the power. Now Montesquieu has<sup>11</sup> a principle not merely for the distribution of power—this follows from the difference of function. You cannot well have two generals the head of an army and so on, whereas the part of the polis which is concerned with legislation or deliberation may very well [consist], and should even consist, of a body of men. In certain other functions there must be a monarchic head: the simplest case is of course that of the army, but there are also other cases where someone must be—say, in an office—the one who has the last say.

So the division of powers has a principle of its own. The separation of powers has also a principle of its own, and the principle here is the greatest possible protection for the individual. If the same group, the same assembly of men who make the laws, have also the power of executing them, mere hatred of a particular individual, [the] accused, will make his case hopeless. But if there is independence of the judiciary, even if the law is very nasty and unfair, there is some protection. The judges may find reasons why this case may not be subsumed under the law in question.

Now this concern for the security of the individual, which of course exists also in Aristotle, is not the key consideration. And that is the meaning of Aristotle's statement that man is a political animal: the polis is prior to the individual, whereas according to the doctrine starting with Hobbes, the individual is prior to society. And the practical conclusions from that are immense. Now no one would assert any more that the individual is prior to society. That very notion of the state of nature has completely disappeared from modern social science, as you surely know, and therefore the question of the individual and individualism has also become somewhat obscured. Individualism had a very clear meaning when it meant [that] man is not by nature a social animal but society is the work of individuals. An untenable view, but at least a clear view. Now we take<sup>12</sup> for granted [today] that man is a social animal, molded by society, and the question is that the rights of the individual have to be protected somehow against this state. But what about society? Is there not a possible totalitarianism of society which is not tyranny of government? Tyranny of government is an easily recognizable thing. Is there not a phenomenon which we call conformism? Not based on any law—you don't go to jail—but there is a kind of social ostracism which can be as hard for the individual as legal consequences. Now this is the price we have to pay for abandoning, with very good and powerful reasons, the notion that literally the individuals precede society and organize society as they as individuals see fit,<sup>13</sup> [in favor of the view] that man, wherever we find him, is already a "quote socialized" being and he can never step outside of society and make demands on it. That is, the distinction between state and society is some help for preserving the libertarian notion in our age.

Book 5, to which we turn now in our very cursory study, is a high point in Aristotle's so-called realism. It contains a discussion of "revolutions," as we say; Aristotle says "changes of regime." "Revolution," as you know, means originally a revolving, coming back to the same point where we were before: the revolutions of the celestial bodies. Now people observed that there are also such comings-back, such returnings, in societies: beginnings, maturities, decays, and so on. The changes have one thing in common: change of direction: now you go this way, and afterward this way. But the use of "revolution" for a change of state is a very modern one. I do not know exactly how it came about, but probably [during the] seventeenth-eighteenth century.

Now in this discussion, Aristotle considers not only the destruction of regimes but also their preservation. Among others, he discusses also the preservation of tyranny. You see, Aristotle can be very open-minded: that is the nearest approximation to "Machiavellianism" which we find in Aristotle. But there is an obvious difference between Aristotle's treatment of the preservation of tyranny and Machiavelli's treatment. In the first place, this discussion of tyranny is only a small part of the *Politics*, whereas one can say the whole *Prince* is devoted to the subject; and secondly, the monstrous character of tyranny is not for one moment concealed or denied by Aristotle, whereas Machiavelli does conceal it. When speaking about the causes of such revolutions, Aristotle does not mention ideology or anything like it. It is very illuminating to contrast this with Hobbes's doctrine, *Leviathan*, chapter 29: "Of those things that weaken or tend to the dissolution of the commonwealth," or the parallel of that in Hobbes's *De Cive*, where Hobbes emphasizes the crucial importance, for the avoiding of violent change, of what he calls seditious doctrines.<sup>xxxv</sup> Well, in the seventeenth century, as we know, doctrines played a very great role in bringing about political change. That was not so in classical antiquity.

There is one point which I thought is particularly characteristic of Aristotle and which I thought we should read. In 1309a32, the beginning of a chapter: three things Aristotle discusses here which are the things preserving regimes. One of them is of course the character of the magistrates, the leading men.

### Student:

Three qualifications are necessary in those who have to fill the sovereign offices. The first is loyalty to the established regime. The second is a high degree of capacity for the duties of the office. The third is the quality of goodness and justice, in the particular form which suits the nature of each regime. (If the *principle* of justice varies from regime to regime, the *quality* of justice must also have its corresponding varieties.) Where these three qualifications are not united in a single person, a problem obviously arises: how is the choice to be made? A may possess, for instance, the second qualification, and have military capacity; but he may lack the other two, and be neither good in character nor loyal to the regime. B may be just in character and loyal to the regime.<sup>xxxvi</sup> How are we to choose? It would seem that we ought to consider two points—which, on the

<sup>xxxv</sup> *De Cive*, 12.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Barker interpolates "[but deficient in capacity]."

whole, is the commoner qualification, and which of them is the rarer.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Thus, for a military office, we must have regard to military experience rather than character: military capacity is rare, and goodness is more common. For the post of custodian of property, or that of treasurer, we must follow the opposite rule: such posts require a standard of character above the average, but the knowledge which they demand is such as we all possess.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

**LS:** Is this clear? A treasurer in the literal sense is a man who takes care of all the coins. The competence which he requires is not very great. He must know how thieves operate and he probably has some guards in addition, but the main point is that he is honest. And this kind of virtue is very common. But the competence required of a general is very different, and here one may have to close one's eyes. A general may not be very good as a democrat, and he may lead a very dissolute life. (What did Lincoln say in the case of Grant, when he was accused of drinking too much? He inquired what kind of whiskey he drank, because he wanted to send it to the other generals.) This is a very practical and sober discussion.

**Student:** "A further problem may also be raised in regard to these three qualifications. If a man possesses the two qualifications of capacity and loyalty to the constitution, is there any need for him to have the third qualification of virtue, and will not the first two, by themselves, secure the public interest?"

**LS:** That's very interesting, because it is a very tough and low and solid view. If he is very loyal, absolutely loyal, to the regime—say, to democracy—and in addition he is very competent, why does he need virtue? Who cares? It's his private matter.

**Student:** "We may answer this question by asking another. May not men who possess these first two qualifications be unable to command their passions? and is it not true that men who have no command of their passions will fail to serve their own interest—even though they possess self-knowledge and self-loyalty—and will equally fail to serve the public interest?"<sup>xxxix</sup>

**LS:** In other words, Aristotle concludes that virtue is truly needed, even if he is very dependable. For if he lacks a certain self-control regarding anger, regarding desires, and so on, he can fail decisively. He makes in the immediate sequel another important point.

**Student:**

Generally, we may add, a regime will tend to be preserved by the observance of all the legal rules already suggested, in the course of our argument, as making for constitutional stability. Here we may note, as of paramount importance, the elementary principle which has been again and again suggested—

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Barker interpolates "[and on that basis we ought to choose the man with the rarer qualification.]"

<sup>xxxviii</sup> *Politics* V.1309a33-b8.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Barker adds the interpolation "[even though they possess a knowledge of public affairs and public loyalty]." *Politics* V.1309b8-14.

the principle of ensuring that the number of those who wish a regime to continue shall be greater than the number of those who do not

In addition to all these things, there is another which ought to be remembered, but which, in fact, is forgotten in perverted forms of government. This is the value of the mean. Many of the measures which are reckoned democratic really undermine democracies: many which are reckoned oligarchical actually undermine oligarchies. The partisans of either of these forms of government, each thinking their own the only right form, push matters to an extreme. They fail to see that proportion is as necessary to a regime as it is (let us say) to a nose. A nose may deviate in some degree from the ideal of straightness, and incline towards the hooked or the snub, without ceasing to be well shaped and agreeable to the eye. But push the deviation still further towards either of these extremes, and the nose will begin to be out of proportion with the rest of the face—<sup>x1</sup>

**LS:** In other words, it will be an ugly nose, whereas a snub nose can still be, as Aristotle says, beautiful and gracious, charming. But if it goes further, the face will be disfigured. And then the last stage?

**Student:** “Carry it further still, and it will cease to look like a nose at all, because it will go too far toward one, and too far away from the other, of these two opposite extremes.”<sup>xli</sup>

**LS:** It will not only cease to look like a nose; it will cease to be a nose, if it goes still a step further.

**Student:** “What is true of the nose, and of other parts of the body, is true also of regimes. Both oligarchy and democracy may be tolerable forms of government, even though they deviate from the ideal. But if you push either of them further still in the direction to which it tends, you will begin by making it a worse regime, and you may end by turning it into something which is not a regime at all.”<sup>xlii</sup>

**LS:** Now that is of course a very important point with which we all are familiar in one way or another. Something may be in itself much more democratic a measure than the alternative, and yet what is more democratic may be ruinous to democracy. An example (which is controversial, I know, but there is some truth in it) was proportional representation, said to be much more democratic than otherwise because every vote will be counted, especially if there is a kind of total addition of the votes of a whole community. This may require the abandonment of some proposals which in themselves, strictly taken, are more democratic.

Yet the most important thing for the preservation of regimes is of course education, and it must be specific education, different in a democracy from that in an oligarchy, etc. And

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<sup>x1</sup> V.1309b14-27.

<sup>xli</sup> V.1309b27-29.

<sup>xlii</sup> V.1309b29-35.

here he says [that] in the case of democracy, a development of the habits by which democracy is maintained . . . and not habits which happen to be popular at the moment. There is a certain difficulty here because it seems to be democratic to choose the populace, but democracy which understands itself, while admitting the principle of the popular, must use a certain qualification in its application. In other words, democracy is not simply rule of the popular will but rule of the will favorable to the people, and something may be favorable to the people without being popular. The simplest example I know is the demobilization of the United States in Europe after the Second World War. It would have been absolutely impossible to keep up a strong army in Europe because of the disinclination of the large majority of the people to “keep the boys over there.” And no one then, neither President Truman nor anyone else who spoke up at least, raised the question whether keeping the boys there might not be the best guarantee for not sending them there within a very short time. Let us turn to 1310a-b.

**Student:** “We have still, however, to treat of the causes of destruction, and the means of preservation, when the government is a monarchy. Generally, what has already been said of constitutions proper is almost equally true of kingships and tyrannies.”<sup>xliii</sup>

**LS:** Here I want to draw attention to the usage. “Regimes,” *politeiai*, here means, obviously, non-monarchical regimes, i.e., republics. And this shows that the distinction, the former distinction, between monarchy and republic was known to Aristotle. Plato’s *Republic* is in Greek titled *Politeia*, a word which I translate by “regime,” and it of course has this double meaning already, not necessarily monarchical.

Book 6 is devoted to a still more detailed study of the practically most important regimes, that is, democracy and oligarchy. We should read the general statement about democracy, because that is very important for understanding our own democratic convictions.

**Student:**

The assumption underlying the democratic regime is liberty. (This, it is commonly said, can only be enjoyed in democracy; and this, it is also said, is the aim of every democracy.) Liberty has more than one form. One of its forms<sup>xliv</sup> consists in the interchange of ruling and being ruled. The democratic conception of justice is the enjoyment of arithmetical equality, and not the enjoyment of proportionate equality on the basis of desert.

**LS:** In other words, everyone gets the same regardless of his deserts, and not what he deserves.

**Student:** “On the<sup>xlv</sup> arithmetical conception of justice the masses must necessarily be sovereign—”

<sup>xliii</sup> *Politics* V.1310a39-b2.

<sup>xliv</sup> Barker inserts here the interpolation “[is the political, which].”

<sup>xlv</sup> Barker has “this.”

**LS:** “The masses” of course doesn’t exist. “The multitude.” “Masses” is a term stemming from modern mechanics (the seventeenth century), and then taken over, especially through the French Revolution, and popularized. *La vie en masse*. There are no masses there.

**Student:**

The multitude<sup>xlvi</sup> must necessarily be sovereign; the will of the majority must be ultimate and must be the expression of justice. The argument is that each citizen should be on an equality with the rest; and the result which follows in democracies is that the poor—they being in a majority, and the will of the majority being sovereign—are more sovereign than the rich. Such is the first form of liberty, which all democracies agree in making the aim of their sort of regime. The other form<sup>xlvi</sup> consists in “living as you like.” Such a life, the democrats argue, is the function of the free man, just as the function of slaves is *not* to live as they like. This is the second aim of democracy. Its issue is, ideally, freedom from any interference of government, and, failing that, such freedom as comes from the interchange of ruling and being ruled. It contributes, in this way, to a general system of liberty based on equality.<sup>xlvi</sup>

**LS:** That is the most fundamental statement about the principle of democracy which we find in Aristotle, therefore we should look at it for one moment. There are two characteristics. The first is freedom, and that has two decisive parts: ruling and being ruled in turn for every citizen. No citizen is simply a subject, he shall also be a ruler—if not now, after the next election. The next is to live as one likes, or permissive egalitarianism. That is strange. Could there not be an austere, Puritan democracy, very egalitarian, and yet not permissive? That is excluded by Aristotle and, I believe, also excluded by modern theory, but is it not in itself possible? —You think not?

**Mr. Levy:** [Inaudible] the reason, I take it, is that virtue can’t be maintained in a regime when the many have become rulers, because the *many* are *unvirtuous*.

**LS:** You go very far [laughter]—you may very well be accused of sedition! But more precisely, the things which are sometimes called Puritan democracy or close to it, for example, in New England, or in Islam, and perhaps certain things in the Old Testament, for that matter—<sup>14</sup> [these are] purely theocratic: under God and under the divine law things are democratically and equally distributed, but there is a law which is not made by the citizen body, however defective or however good. In other words, we should not call these kinds of regimes simple democracies, we should say these are theocracies. They can of course also be monarchistic. The end of democracy is freedom, and a free man is one who is not bossed around by anyone. An unfree man must obey his boss—whether the boss is a master in the old sense or whether he is one’s officer in an office, a boss can boss around and no free man likes to be bossed around. That is quite clear. But unfortunately it is altogether impossible. Everyone living in society, unless he is an

<sup>xlvi</sup> On Strauss’s suggestion the reader substitutes “the multitude” for Barker’s “the masses.”

<sup>xlvi</sup> Barker interpolates “[is the civil, which].”

<sup>xlvi</sup> *Politics* VI.1317a40-b17.



absolute monarch, is being bossed around by somebody, and even the president of the United States will soon be bossed around by certain committees or legislators. So how can we get the closest approximation to that freedom which we like? Answer: if we are never ruled by anybody who is not in his turn also ruled by us. Political equality. Someone has the right to boss [me] around, but a year from now I have a chance to boss him around. So bossing is necessary, but if it is properly distributed it is no longer resented because, while I have the burden of being bossed, I also have the pleasure of bossing. And that makes up for it.

Some things in Aristotle remind one of Rousseau, but there is a very great difference between Aristotle and Rousseau which is immediately relevant. Aristotle does not suggest for one moment here that in a democracy there must be a total submission of everyone in every respect to the general will. This would not be fair. If so, then we would not have this permissiveness; it is as important for freedom in the democratic sense as egalitarianism. This we want: to live as we like, again within the limits of the possible—an easygoing egalitarianism. Now if you read Pericles' funeral speech you find something like this stated there: easygoingness is contrasted to the tough discipline of the Spartan regime. (Pericles does not speak of democracy, mind you, he speaks of the Athenian regime, and how you call it, that he leaves to you.) What characterizes their regime is the degree of public-spiritedness and of dedication to the city which you find, according to Pericles, nowhere else.<sup>xlix</sup> This of course is not a part of what Aristotle says in attempting to describe democracy as such and not Athenian democracy. We may say [that] for the sake of freedom, there can be only a limited equality, political equality, because a complete equality, say, social equality, would then interfere much too much with permissiveness. It is of course understood, although not said here, that only a part of the inhabitants of the city will be citizens. There will be slaves, and it will be very difficult for foreigners to become citizens. In other words, there are no rights of men—not according to Aristotle's view only, but according to ancient democracy itself. Freedom is not a right, but a privilege, that is the tacit premise.

Now this much about the theory of democracy, if you can call that a theory. That is the whole "quote ideology" of democracy. Can you call this an ideology? I would say no, because there is no reference to any other principle taken from nature, or metaphysics, or theology, or any science. It is simply based on the feeling of the majority of the people—"I don't want to be bossed"—and the two implications I stated. If this were given sophisticated justification of one kind or another—but this is not even attempted. These [are]<sup>15</sup> like sturdy people who have done their fighting when they were in their younger years and know they are the sons of the soil, stemming by their descent from many generations. You know, they were the ones who defeated the Persians in the Persian Wars, that is enough. It would be a gross injustice to these men to say that is an ideology. That they have opinions, that is undeniable, but to call this an ideology, there is something fundamentally wrong with that.

Now in order to see Aristotle's procedure, let us read the immediate sequel.

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<sup>xlix</sup> Thucydides II.37-39.

**Student:**

Such being the hypothesis<sup>i</sup> of democracy, and the root from which it develops, we can now proceed to study its attributes or institutions. There is the election of officers *by* all, and *from* all; there is the system of all ruling over each, and each, in his turn, over all; there is the method of appointing by lot to all offices—or, at any rate, to all which do not require some practical experience and professional skill; there is the rule that there should be no property-qualification for office—or, at any rate, the lowest possible; there is the rule that, apart from the military offices, there should be no office held twice by the same person—<sup>ii</sup>

**LS:** That is because generals of high caliber are very rare; thus Pericles was a general for ten years.

**Student:**

or only on few occasions, and those relating to a few offices,<sup>lii</sup> and there is, finally, the rule that the tenure of every office—or, at any rate, of as many as possible—should be brief.<sup>liii</sup> There is the system of popular courts, composed of all the citizens or of persons selected from all, and competent to decide all cases—or, at any rate, most of them, and those the greatest and most important, such as the audit of official accounts, constitutional issues, and matters of contract.<sup>liv</sup> There is the rule that the popular assembly should be sovereign in all matters—or, at any rate, in the most important; and conversely that the executive magistracies should be sovereign in none—or, at any rate, in as few as possible.<sup>lv</sup>

**LS:** I hope you seized the spirit of this enumeration. We know first the end of democracy, and in light of the end, we understand why these institutions prevail, for example, why certain offices are only for a short time: it gives them much greater<sup>16</sup> [time] for citizens to fill up these offices in their turn. I think it is a model of clarity as to how such analyses should be made. . . . There are many things in these six Books which deserve our attention, but we cannot take them up for now. Especially I would mention (you might read at home) in 1319b33 following what one can call the social policy in a democracy, what should be done by it in order to alleviate the fate of the poor, a subject now of great and immediate importance in this country. I would like to turn in conclusion to a broader subject which we will not be able to exhaust in any way today, but at least we can begin.

Now what is the most obvious limitation of Aristotle's political science, from a method[ological] point of view? I will not go into the question of whether he was right or wrong on every point. The most obvious thing we can say is [that] he did not know

<sup>i</sup> The reader substitutes "hypothesis" for Barker's "ideal."

<sup>ii</sup> The Barker translation differs slightly: "no office should ever be held twice by the same person."

<sup>iii</sup> Restoring words from Barker: "or, at any rate, only on few occasions, and those relating only to a few offices."

<sup>liii</sup> Barker inserts the interpolation "[Under the head of the judicature]."

<sup>liv</sup> Barker interpolates "[Under the head of the deliberative]."

<sup>lv</sup> *Politics* VI.1317b17-30.

anything of the regimes which are of particular interest to us, contemporary modern regimes, and he did not provide for them. For his schema of the six, as you will remember, does not make provision for inserting<sup>17</sup> such things as liberal democracy or communism. But I would contend that Aristotle provides for the modern regimes indirectly—indirectly because he enables us to understand the principle, the peculiar principle, of the modern regime. Now he does this by pointing to the question which answered in one way leads to the regimes known to him, and answered in another way leads to the modern view. What is that question?

In the Third Book he started from the polarity, the well-known polarity between democracy and oligarchy, but next passed to the polarity of democracy and kingship. In a radical sense, the city is as such democratic. In a radical sense. I have explained that. I remind you only of the fact that we have observed that the first definition of a citizen given in Book 3 was democratic. Now what is this radical sense in which the city is as such democratic? If the *dēmos*, the common people, from which “democracy” is derived, is understood to comprise all non-philosophers. From this point of view kings, noblemen, the rich, and what have you are as much common people as the poorest working man. Or differently stated, the true gentleman is the philosopher. Now if this is true, then gentlemen in the ordinary sense of the term are so only by courtesy or by pretense. The absolute king, of whom he speaks toward the end of the Third Book, the Zeus-like ruler, is the political reflection of the philosopher, and only as such does he make sense in the context of the teaching of Aristotle as a whole. But of course, [as] we have seen in the Seventh Book, the rule of such a man is altogether impossible. The city is recalcitrant to philosophy. Socrates’ condemnation was not accidental: there is a disharmony between philosophy and the city, a tension between philosophy and the city. The city needs popularly intelligible principles whatever the regime may be. And the true principles are not necessarily popularly intelligible. The city and the philosopher have different ends. This is, we can say, the premise of men like Aristotle and Plato. But one can very well raise the question: Is this true? We have heard from modern philosophers, such as Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes (to mention only men from that heroic age of modern philosophy), that science is for the sake of power, for the relief of man’s estate, for making man master and owner of nature. Now if this is the sound view, it follows that the ends of the philosopher and [of] the non-philosophers are identical. If the end of the philosopher is to relieve man’s estate, this end is not peculiar to the philosopher, only the philosophers can make a contribution which the non-philosophers cannot. Now this is one side of the question.

The other side is<sup>18</sup> [the belief] in modern times<sup>19</sup> that philosophy will not cease to be philosophy if it is diffused, if it is taken notice of, if it is taken in a fundamentally passive manner by listening, by mere reading, etc. In other words, philosophy calls for and is compatible with *enlightenment*. Enlightenment in its original form was of course a very limited affair. I think the first man who can be said to have started it, a Frenchman called Fontenelle, presented the new cosmology to French nobility, who, according to all ordinary social standards, do not belong to the *dēmos*.<sup>lvi</sup> But they belong to the *dēmos*

<sup>lvi</sup> Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657-1757), author and popularizer, incorporated elements of Cartesian physics in his book *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686).

from the point of view of Descartes. Now as we know, since the eighteenth century and even more in our age, [this is] a matter<sup>20</sup> which is no longer seriously considered. So much so that John Dewey could identify the method of democracy with the method of, in most cases, discussion, debate—a thought which would be wholly unintelligible if stated in this way to Plato and Aristotle. Because the very simple thing is that in political debates, all kinds of assumptions will be made which are good enough for practical purposes [but] which in a theoretical discussion would never be permissible. Modern democracy rests on an anti-classic view of the relation of the city, the political society, and philosophy, and a part of this element is of course that modern science and philosophy are the same thing. [This] makes possible the economy of plenty, therefore the mass of the population can become educated, and therefore there is no longer any necessity that democracy should be the rule of the uneducated, as Aristotle says. In other words, the modern answer to Aristotle is that no one wants the rule of the uneducated, but who says that the majority of the population in a democracy must be or remain uneducated?

Here we are. Now as for communism and fascism, they do not affect this picture at all because they are reactions to modern democracy in many ways, and can only be understood on the basis of an understanding of modern democracy. If one does not consider this aspect of the question, that modern democracies are based massively on technology,<sup>21</sup> [and] if we go deeper into their history, on the new notion of science, developed in the seventeenth century<sup>22</sup>—if one does not take this into consideration one does not understand democracy. You cannot leave it at the mere phenomena as they strike you today at first glance, although one must surely know them, take cognizance of them; one must go into their depths, one must analyze them, and then I believe one arrives at an adequate understanding of the problem.

Now this much about the true limitations of Aristotle's political science,<sup>23</sup> at least if we remain within the limits of political science as now understood. But Aristotle's political science differed from present-day political science most obviously by the following fact: that his political science is the second part of a bipartite enterprise. The first part is called, in its literary presentation, the *Ethics*, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and today in political science the notion that ethics should be the first part, the basic part, of political science, would be received not with incredulity but with ridicule. Whether this is the superiority of modern political science to the Aristotelian one is a long question into which we cannot go here. I have made some remarks about this subject from time to time.

The whole discussion in the *Politics*, we have seen, rests ultimately on the premise that there is such a thing as human virtue or excellence, and of course a variety of such virtues. But this is not elaborated there; the elaboration we find in the *Ethics*. The great question regarding the *Ethics*, which we will try to develop next time, concerns the character of the knowledge of these moral principles. Today of course this is also the issue, only this issue is regarded as foreclosed. There is no knowledge of moral principles, they are somehow imposed upon us by our society, or whatnot, but there is not strictly speaking a knowledge of them as the true moral principles. Now this is certainly the obscurest point in Aristotle's *Ethics*: the cognitive status of the moral principles. And

I will devote at least some part of the last meeting to this subject, and if we have still time, to make some remarks on the difference between Aristotle and Plato, the other great representative of classical political philosophy. Is there any point you wish to question? Yes, Mr. Levy?

**Mr. Levy:** What makes this book “philosophy”? How does it differ, for instance, from a highly competent statement like Ernest Barker’s *Reflections on Government*, which is also a survey of regimes in a certain way? Or is it?

**LS:** Well, I have no objection to that. Barker, as he has shown to some extent at least by devoting so much labor to bringing out this honest and useful translation—Barker has no opposition to political philosophy. Why not? I have no objection. My criticism of Barker is simply this, and this means a questioning of him as a political philosopher, [is] that Barker was fundamentally a Victorian. The great shocks which were applied to us in our century, especially after the First World War—which was already a big shock as you know, but not comparable to what happened in the thirties—I believe did not give him occasion to reflect, to go deeper into political problems than he had done. In other words, there is a kind of dignified classicism in Barker which is in one way very attractive, at least to me, but in another way also not sufficient, because when the waves rise as high as they do in our age, then some toughness is needed in countering them which I do not find in Barker. Barker, in other words, continues in a certain British tradition represented by people like<sup>24</sup> T. H. Green, and that is now no longer alive,<sup>lvii</sup> and one could say that is merely a deplorable fact, but it has some reason. There are needs, demands, intellectual demands which are not satisfied by that.

**Mr. Levy:** So it is completeness which defines philosophy and distinguishes it from all other kinds of studies.

**LS:** Yes. Comprehensiveness, I would say, but equally important is the depth, how deeply you go in analyzing things. There is a kind of comprehensiveness which some very clever globetrotters have, like those who have seen the minds and laws of many lands and are under the spell of the prejudices which they sucked in with their mother’s milk. So there is very great variety and there can be something good about that—a high-class journalism, I highly respect. That is not philosophy. What you need in addition is analysis and the bringing out of the reasons why these things are, and that is not possible today, at any rate, without a certain *kind* of historical studies. I don’t say historical studies simply, because historical studies can be unenlightening and merely antiquarian and irrelevant. And even if people speak of history of ideas, that can be very unenlightening, a kind of exciting panorama of the variety of opinions which men held in different times without at any moment being concerned with the question: Which are the true ideas? You would have to say: A philosophically-inspired history. And then we come back again to: What is philosophy? And I must return to the very simple definition of philosophy which was suggested by both modern and ancient philosophers, and which

<sup>lvii</sup> Thomas Hill Green (1836-1882), British Hegelian philosopher and political liberal. His major works were lectures on political obligation delivered in Oxford in 1879 (published as *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation*, and *Prolegomena to Ethics* (1883).

is so simple that it might very well appear ridiculous: philosophy is the attempt to know the truth about all things. I think that is a fitting conclusion for this class. [Laughter]

[end of session]

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<sup>1</sup> Moved "the common people."

<sup>2</sup> Deleted "And this excludes."

<sup>3</sup> Changed from "the so-called aristocracy are those who"

<sup>4</sup> Deleted "And the citizen is."

<sup>5</sup> Deleted "a citizen."

<sup>6</sup> Deleted "or misleading? Because." Moved "or misleading."

<sup>7</sup> Deleted "if."

<sup>8</sup> Deleted "with."

<sup>9</sup> Deleted "it."

<sup>10</sup> Deleted "Mr. Bruell, will you allow me?"

<sup>11</sup> Deleted "as."

<sup>12</sup> Moved "today."

<sup>13</sup> Deleted "but."

<sup>14</sup> Deleted "this."

<sup>15</sup> Deleted "people, like."

<sup>16</sup> Deleted "charm."

<sup>17</sup> Deleted "as you will remember."

<sup>20</sup> Deleted "of."

<sup>21</sup> Deleted "but."

<sup>22</sup> Deleted "that."

<sup>23</sup> Deleted "are."

<sup>24</sup> Deleted "Green, you know."

## Session 16: no date

**Leo Strauss:** <sup>1</sup>Today, I would like to finish the discussion of Aristotle and, if some time is left, to say a few words about Plato's political philosophy in contradistinction to Aristotle's. Now we have spoken about Aristotle's political science [and]<sup>2</sup> [its] chief theme, the variety of regimes. We haven't yet considered its basis. The basis, we can say and must say, is the end of man. The end of man consists according to Aristotle in the unimpeded practice of virtue, "unimpeded" meaning you must have certain equipment in order to do that. You must be healthy and not completely unsupplied with funds, because this would make it impossible for you to practice virtue in every respect. Now virtue means here primarily of course moral virtue. What moral virtue is, what kinds of moral virtue there are, is discussed in the first part of Aristotle's work concerning political philosophy, and that first part is known by the name of *Ethics*. There you find a detailed discussion of virtue in general, and of the various kinds of virtues—especially, as they are mentioned,<sup>1</sup> moral virtues. This term, ["moral virtues"], has been coined by Aristotle.<sup>3</sup> Now virtue belongs somehow with morality, therefore, and also with the moral law, as it later was called, which was also more or less identical with the natural law. "Natural law" is a term of Greek extraction; "moral law," as far as I know, is of Christian theological origin and was originally used for designating a part of the old law, of the Old Testament law. This only in passing. There is no natural law in Aristotle. Aristotle does mention the term in his *Rhetoric*, but his *Rhetoric* does not present Aristotle's own views but the view which an orator has to use, and in particular which a forensic orator has to use.

I propose that we have a look at Aristotle's statement on this subject, which is truly Aristotle, i.e., which he does not report from popular opinion, but which he speaks in his own name. That is in the Fifth Book of the *Ethics*, page 294 in the Loeb edition.<sup>ii</sup>

Political Justice is of two kinds, one natural, the other conventional. A rule of justice is natural that has the same validity everywhere, and does not depend on our accepting it or not. A rule is conventional that in the first instance may be settled in one way or the other indifferently, though having once been settled it is not indifferent: for example, that the ransom for a prisoner shall be a mina, that a sacrifice shall consist of a goat and not of two sheep; and any regulations for particular cases, for instance the sacrifice enacted in honor of Brasidas, and ordinances in the nature of special decrees. Some people think that all rules of justice are merely conventional, because whereas what is by nature is immutable and has the same validity everywhere, as fire burns both here and in Persia, rules of justice are seen to vary. That rules of justice vary is not absolutely true, but only with qualifications. Among the gods indeed it is perhaps not true at all; but in our world, although there is such a thing as natural justice [LS: "the just by nature"] all rules of justice are variable. But nevertheless there is such a thing as natural justice as

<sup>i</sup> It is possible that Strauss said or meant "as we have mentioned" or "as they are called."

<sup>ii</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939).

well as justice not by nature;<sup>iii</sup> and it is easy to see which rules of justice, though not absolute, are natural, and which are not natural but legal and conventional, both sorts alike being variable. The same distinction will hold good in all other matters; for instance, the right hand is naturally stronger than the left, yet it should be possible for any man to make himself ambidextrous

The rules of justice based on convention and expediency are alike standard measures. Corn and wine measures are not equal in all places, but are larger in wholesale and smaller in retail markets. Similarly the rules of justice ordained not by nature but by man are not the same in all places, since forms of government are not the same, though in all places there is only one form of government that is natural, namely, the best form.

**LS:** Well, “which is by nature the best.” Now this is the single page which Aristotle devotes to that great subject of the ages: natural right. Now what does he mean by that? You see, there is no clear example given of natural right, we only have to figure it out. For example, when he says to sacrifice a goat, but not two sheep—this is conventional. But what about sacrificing in general? Perhaps he means this is by nature right, worship of the gods. And similarly, to ransom prisoners for this and this amount is conventional, but that you should ransom prisoners or, more generally stated, that you should help fellow-citizens who in the course of civic duty have come into trouble, this is by nature valid. Helping citizens out of misfortune into which they have fallen as a consequence of performing a civic duty, and worshipping the gods, this is by nature right. We would then have to say, as a general definition: the natural right is that right by which every city stands or falls. You see here, at the beginning of the passage read, natural right is declared to be a part of political right. That does not necessarily mean that there are no natural-right relations between individuals as distinguished from citizens, say, between complete foreigners who meet somewhere in a forest. Aristotle would think that there are relations of right not established by human convention between any human beings. But what he has in mind is that only among fellow-citizens, and only grown-up fellow-citizens, for that matter,<sup>4</sup> do relations of right acquire their full density. For example, within the family, relations of right do not acquire their full density, because children ordinarily have property rights among themselves or against their parents, and so on. But if the people are fellow-citizens independent of each other, there you have the fullest density.

Now to come back to the examples to which Aristotle seems to allude: if it is correct that natural right is that right by which every city stands or falls, then we would have to say natural right is the flooring, the minimum condition. This seems to be confirmed by the example of the right-handed and [the] ambidextrous man. All men are by nature right-handed, but we can acquire ambidexterity by training. Now if we assume that Aristotle thinks that ambidexterity is preferable to right-handedness, is a greater perfection of the man, then it would mean this: that natural right plus conventional right is higher than mere natural right, or that intelligent conventional right is higher than mere natural right. Now if this is so, then natural right is indifferent to the difference of regimes. Whether it is a democracy [or] an oligarchy, in all cases these conditions would have to be fulfilled. Positive right of course is relative to the regime: it is either democratic or oligarchic, etc. Yet, and that is a conclusion, one regime alone is by nature

<sup>iii</sup> These words were taken from Rackham and added to the transcript: “all rules of justice are variable. But nevertheless there is such a thing as natural justice as well as justice not by nature.” Rackham in fact ends this selection with the words “justice not ordained by nature.” NE V.1034b18-1135a5.



best everywhere: this is by nature, not by any human establishment. This regime (the most divine regime, as Aristotle says elsewhere)<sup>iv</sup> is full kingship, as we have seen. But this full kingship is the only regime which does not require any laws, where the superior man rules by looking at each case and its requirements. So we would have to say [that] the minimum condition and the maximum, the flooring and the ceiling, are natural and do not in any way depend on *nomos*, on law.

Yet—we have not yet considered the key passage—all just things, whether they are conventional or natural, are changeable. Thomas Aquinas's explanation is [that] this is not literally true: it applies only to the conclusion from the principles. The principles themselves are unchangeable. Aristotle himself does not make this distinction. Now how can this be understood? What Aristotle literally says is that there is no single rule of justice, natural or positive, which is not open to qualification, just qualification. Now we have seen in the *Politics*, for instance, the case of ostracism: that a man is banished, not for any crime he has committed, but for his very virtues and excellence. Why? Because his excellences threaten the normal course of events, especially in the case of a democracy. We have also seen the case of slavery, where Aristotle lays down the clear rule: no one shall be a slave who is not by nature a slave, and then later on, when he discusses slavery in the context of his best regime, he suggests that slaves be given the prospect of emancipation, which would be wholly impossible in the case of natural slaves—i.e., he takes it for granted that this best regime would have [un]natural slaves. The answer would be that some infraction of justice in one way or another may be required, even of natural justice.

I referred to the difference between Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle regarding natural right in this particular passage here. Some of you may be interested in a recent discussion of which I became aware. There was a symposium at Wellesley at which Mr. Pegis of the Pontifical Institute of Toronto read a very interesting paper about the Thomistic doctrine of natural law, asserting that this doctrine is not a philosophic teaching but a theological teaching—I believe an interpretation which is not in accordance with the traditional view—and I was told there was a certain excitement about it, though I couldn't be present at the lecture.<sup>v</sup> Still, it is worthy of serious consideration. Professor Pegis did not answer the question: What is Thomas Aquinas's philosophic view of natural right? which I would have liked to hear. That is, the mere fact that the teaching that is found in the *Summa* is *not* philosophic but theologic does not answer that question.

This much about the question of natural right in Aristotle. Let us now broaden the question. The principles of human action, according to Aristotle, or the noble things, as Aristotle puts it—what is their cognitive status? Let us now turn to the *Ethics*,<sup>v</sup> 1139b14-18 (Loeb edition, page 331).

Let us now discuss these matters afresh,<sup>vi</sup> going more deeply into the matter. [LS: He means now the intellectual virtues.]

<sup>iv</sup> *Politics* IV.1289a40.

<sup>v</sup> This paper was apparently never published, and no reference to it has been found.

<sup>vi</sup> "Let us then discuss these virtues afresh," in Rackham.

Let it be assumed that there are five qualities through which the mind achieves truth in affirmation or denial, namely, art or technical skill, scientific knowledge, prudence, wisdom, and intelligence. Conception and opinion are capable of error.<sup>vii</sup>

Let us stop here. Now none of these, with the exception of the central one, prudence, can have any relevance for ethics. Let us turn to page 337, where he speaks about practical wisdom or prudence particularly.

We may arrive at a definition of prudence by considering who are the persons whom we call prudent. Now it is held to be the mark of a prudent man to be able to deliberate well about what is good and advantageous for himself, not in some one department, for instance what is good for his health or strength, but what is advantageous as a means to the good life in general.<sup>viii</sup>

The implication is this: regarding all parts of your welfare or well-being (or most of the parts), you have experts, but regarding your well-being and happiness as a whole, there are no experts. That everyone must do for himself. Now there are people who cannot take care of their well-being as a whole. Must they be sent to experts? Well, we always have such people around—I have forgotten the delicate and euphemistic term used, which is quite common. But think simply of children. Children cannot take care of their well-being as a whole: they have parents. Therefore a mature human being, if he is not truly (what is the term they use?) moronic, more or less must be able to take care of himself. That cannot be left to any experts. There is no expertise regarding ethics.

This is proved by the fact that we speak of people as prudent or wise in some particular thing, when they calculate well with a view to attaining some particular end of value (other than those ends which are the object of an art); so that the prudent man in general will be the man who is good at deliberating in general

But no one deliberates about things that cannot vary, nor about things not within his power to do. Hence inasmuch as scientific knowledge involves demonstration, whereas things whose fundamental principles are variable are not capable of demonstration, because everything about them is variable, and inasmuch as one cannot deliberate about things that are of necessity, it follows that prudence is not the same as science. Nor can it be the same as art.

Art in the sense here is not fine art, of course, but a skill, such as carpentry or any other production.

It is not science, because matters of conduct admit of variation; and not art, because doing and making are generically different, since making aims at an end distinct from the act of making, whereas in doing the end cannot be other than the act itself: doing well is in itself the end.<sup>ix</sup>

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<sup>vii</sup> NE VI.1139b14-18.

<sup>viii</sup> NE VI.1140a24-28.

<sup>ix</sup> NE VI.1140a28-1140b7.

This is the formal definition of prudence or practical wisdom given by Aristotle. But this is obviously not sufficient. Let us turn to page 367.

But we must go a little deeper into the objection that prudence does not render men more capable of performing noble and just actions. Let us start with the following consideration. As some people, we maintain, perform just acts and yet are not just men (for instance, those who do what the law enjoins but do it unwillingly, or in ignorance, or for some ulterior object—

Does this make sense, this simple thing, that someone may do the right thing for the wrong reason? I think you all know that a man may act nobly<sup>6</sup> on the basis of very low calculation; then of course he does not act nobly, he is good only externally. So it all depends on the choice, on the intention, as one would say—

and not for the sake of the actions themselves, although they are as a matter of fact doing what they ought to do and all that a good man should), on the other hand, it appears, there is a state of mind in which a man may do these various acts with the result that he really is a good man: I mean when he does them from choice, and for the sake of the acts themselves. Now rightness in our choice of an end is secured by virtue; but to do the acts that must in the nature of things be done in order to attain the end we have chosen, is not a matter for virtue but for a different faculty

We must dwell on this point to make it clearer. There is a certain faculty called cleverness, which is the capacity for doing the things aforesaid that conduce to the aim we propose, and so attaining that aim. If the aim is noble this is a praiseworthy faculty; if base, it is mere knavery; this is how we come to speak of both prudent men and mere knaves as clever. Now this faculty is not identical with prudence, but prudence implies it. But that eye of the soul of which we spoke cannot acquire the quality of prudence without possessing virtue. This we have said before, and it is manifestly true. For deductive inferences about matters of conduct always have a major premise of the form “Since the end of supreme good is so and so” (whatever it may be, since we may take it as anything we like for the sake of the argument); but the supreme good only appears good to the good man: vice perverts the mind and causes it to hold false views about the first principles of conduct. Hence it is clear that we cannot be prudent without being good.<sup>x</sup>

Now what Aristotle has in mind can be illustrated by the result of Socrates’ argument in the First Book of the *Republic*, where he reaches the conclusion that the guardian or keeper is the same as the thief, namely, what they have to know is exactly the same.<sup>xi</sup> How can you be a good thief if you do not know how to open these doors and where are the things you want to get out? And to be a good keeper you have to know this. So the intellectual element is the same. And the first reaction, I think, of every reader of the *Republic* to this particular argument would be that Socrates abstracts in a strange way from the moral intention, which of course is entirely different on the part of the thief on the one hand, and of the honest keeper on the other. But then the question arises: What is that honest intention?

<sup>x</sup> NE VI.1144a11-b1.

<sup>xi</sup> *Republic* 333e-334b.

Now Aristotle drives the argument somewhat deeper and says, partly agreeing with Socrates, [that] the intellectual element is more than this kind of knowledge which the thief and the guardian possess. In the case of the honest man, the intellectual virtue which he needs is necessarily tinged by virtue, whereas in the dishonest man it is not tinged by virtue. And this he draws out, but obviously it is a distinction between a merely clever man and a prudent man. The prudent man, the practically wise man, is one whose intellectual faculty regarding practical matters is tinged by virtue, whereas that of the merely clever man is not. But this leads to a further question: How does he get his virtue? The practical wisdom, the prudence itself, only enables him to define or to find out what he should do in the circumstances. But how come he will only make decent choices in the circumstances? This is not yet guaranteed by prudence.

Now let us take a simple example: someone needs money. There are  $n$  ways of getting money, some decent and honest, some dishonest. Now the prudent man excludes the dishonest ones as a matter of course, whereas a crook considers them also and makes his pick. He might in a given situation choose the honest way because it is the most convenient for him, but nevertheless that is not because it is honest. How<sup>7</sup> does the prudent or decent man know *that for the sake of which* he chooses this particular honest action in preference to another honest way of action? How does he know the end? Now Aristotle has said here that the choice, the intention, becomes correct *through virtue*, meaning moral virtue, whereas prudence deals only with the ends, meaning what action now, in order to get money. But on the premise that it must be an honest one, how does he get the end? The general answer from Aristotle can be said to be this: How do we become good, if we are not good? Answer: By upbringing, by breeding—by being told from childhood: “Do that” and “Don’t do that” and acting on it. Perhaps because we are spanked or given candies, as the case may be, but gradually it becomes a habit so that we cannot well act otherwise. Very well, this is good: by breeding. But how can we distinguish between sound and perverse breeding? After all, it is thinkable that a child is brought up very severely with many “dos” and “don’ts,” and yet they are, not necessarily immoral, but somewhat perverse. How does practical reason get its highest or ultimate principles? That is one of the most difficult questions in Aristotle.

Now in order to understand that, I would like to give you an example. Almost any will do, but I somehow feel that the one which I suggest is the most practical. In Aristotle’s *Ethics*, in his discussion of the individual virtues, there are two peaks, two virtues which comprise in different ways all other virtues, and they are magnanimity and justice. Justice comprises all virtues from the point of view of our relation to other human beings. Magnanimity comprises all virtues from the point of view of our self-perfection. Now let us have a look at the section on magnanimity. That is in the Loeb on page 213.

Greatness of soul [LS: that is a more Anglo-Saxon translation of “magnanimity”<sup>8</sup>] as the word itself implies, seems to be related to great objects; let us first ascertain what sort of objects these are. It will make no difference whether we examine the quality itself or the person that displays the quality.

In other words, whether we look at magnanimity or the magnanimous man, the practical result is the same.

Now a person is thought to be great-souled if he claims much and deserves much; he who claims much without deserving it is foolish, but no one of moral excellence is foolish or senseless. The great-souled man is then as we have described. He who deserves little and claims little is modest or temperate, but not great-souled, since to be great-souled involves greatness just as handsomeness involves size: small people may be neat and well-made, but not handsome. He that claims much but does not deserve much is vain; though not everybody who claims more than he deserves is vain. He that claims less than he deserves is small-souled, whether his deserts be great or only moderate, or even though he deserves little, if he claims still less. The most small-souled of all would seem to be the man who claims less than he deserves when his deserts are great; for what would he have done had he not deserved so much?

Though therefore in regard to the greatness of his claim the great-souled man is an extreme, by reason of its rightness he stands at the mean point, for he claims what he deserves [LS: this remark about the extreme is known to every one of you from the Cow Palace in San Francisco]<sup>xii</sup> while the vain and the small-souled err by excess and defect respectively.

If then the great-souled man claims and is worthy of great things and most of all the greatest things, greatness of soul must be concerned with some one object especially. “Worthy” is a term of relation: it denotes having a claim to goods external to oneself. Now the greatest external good we should assume to be the thing which we offer as a tribute to the gods, and which is most coveted by men of high station, and is the prize awarded for the noblest deeds; and such a thing is honor, for honor is clearly the greatest of external goods. Therefore the great-souled man is he who has the right disposition in relation to honors and disgraces. And even without argument it is evident that honor is the object with which the great-souled are concerned.<sup>xiii</sup>

We cannot read the whole thing. Let us now turn to 1125a1.

He will be incapable of living at the will of another, unless a friend, since to do so is slavish, and hence flatterers are always servile, and humble people flatterers. He is not prone to admiration, since nothing is great to him. He does not bear a grudge, for it is not a mark of greatness to recall things against people, especially the wrongs they have done you, but rather to overlook them. He is no gossip; for he will not talk either about himself or about another, as he neither wants to receive compliments, nor to hear other people run down (nor is he lavish of praise either); and so he is not given to speaking evil himself, even of his enemies, except when he intends to give offence deliberately.

Literally, “except if by insolence.”

In troubles that cannot be avoided, or trifling mishaps, he will never cry out nor ask for help, since to do so would imply that he took them to heart. He likes owning beautiful

<sup>xii</sup> “Cow Palace”: another reference to Senator Goldwater’s speech at the 1964 Republican National Convention.

<sup>xiii</sup> *NE* IV.1123a34-b23.

and useless things, rather than useful things, that bring in return, since the former show his independence more. Other traits generally attributed to the great-souled man, are a slow gait, a deep voice, and a deliberate utterance; to speak in shrill tones and walk fast denotes an excitable and nervous temperament, which does not belong to one who cares for few things and thinks nothing good.<sup>xiv</sup>

Yes. How does Aristotle know what he tells us about the great-souled man?<sup>9</sup> I think we would recognize it, but this is not quite sufficient. There is a story of Napoleon, that he never acquired that gait which the noble men of ancient times had; he always walked too fast, as if he were at the head of a platoon. Now why Aristotle says here his motions are thought to be slow, and his voice deep—who makes these suppositions? . . . They are *made*—by people, by people who know. I mean, there are people who don't see a difference between the great-souled man and others, but they are incompetent, just as people talking about colors who do not know colors are incompetent regarding colors. But some of these things are verging on the silly, others not; they all are known by opinion, by *doxa*. This is empirically so—no demonstration, no deduction.

Now<sup>10</sup> compare that with the procedure of Plato, in the *Republic* especially.<sup>xv</sup> Plato singles out four virtues there: wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. Then Plato tries to prove to you that there are these four and only these four virtues. The proof is that the soul is such that it has a desiring part, the virtue of which is called temperance; another part is called spiritedness, the virtue of which is courage, controlled spiritedness; and then there is wisdom, controlled reason, educated reason; and justice is needed in order to keep them together in one way or another. So Plato gives us a rational account of virtue. Aristotle does not refer to that. You remember the deduction of the six regimes which he gave us in Book 3, and he showed us there can be these three and only these three regimes, although there may be mixtures. He does nothing of the kind in the *Ethics*. Now<sup>11</sup> how can we understand that? Because we have the natural and legitimate desire to see how these virtues are connected, what their bases are, or simply how they are deduced from higher principles. If you read the discussion of the virtues in Thomas's *Summa Theologica*, you will see that there is such a deduction there, but Thomas uses also the material supplied by the Stoic writers and other ancient writers, that is to say, by a school that is much closer in certain respects to Plato than to Aristotle.<sup>xvi</sup> Aristotle does not do that. But we must nevertheless address this question to Aristotle, whether he satisfies it or not: that is: How do you know this? Or, if you can know this, you must tell us why. Now as we learn from other writings of Aristotle, practical reason receives its most general principles from theoretical reason, ultimately from the end of man.<sup>xvii</sup> Therefore, we have to know the principle from which we would start in any deductive procedure: the moral virtues are required for the end of man. Very good, but there is one great difficulty. If they are required for the end of man, are they not also choiceworthy for their own sake? And perhaps Aristotle does not want to deduce them, because a deduction would always mean a subordination. Aristotle never says that they are needed for the end of man.

<sup>xv</sup> *Republic* 427d-444e.

<sup>xv</sup> *Republic* 427d-444e.

<sup>xvi</sup> Possibly a reference to *ST* 1-2ae, q94 a1-3.

<sup>xvii</sup> From *City and Man* 26n, it appears that Strauss here has in mind *De anima* 434a16-21 and 432b27-30.

In order to understand that, we have to consider that for Aristotle *the* end of man is the theoretical life, the life of contemplation, the life of the philosopher. Does this highest end of man require the moral virtues? Aristotle doesn't ever answer the question explicitly, but Thomas Aquinas does for him. He says [that] prudence is the only intellectual virtue which is not possible without moral virtue, of course because it has to do with action, and our intellectual action must be tinged by morality, otherwise we will be knaves, or crooks. But wisdom, theoretical wisdom proper, does not require moral virtue, Thomas suggests.<sup>xviii</sup> But is this not wholly unintelligible? Does not the pursuit of knowledge require, for example, courage, as we speak of intellectual courage? Sobriety? I mean, a drunk is not likely to make great progress in finding the truth. Furthermore, does not the theoretical man have to live in society, and therefore the social virtues like justice are necessary? Obviously! But the question is, how do these virtues appear from the point of view of theoretical wisdom, which is the end? They appear only as means.

This view has been stated in a very powerful way in modern times by Nietzsche, in the third part of his *Genealogy of Morals*. There he says: Of course the philosophers are moral people, but the morality doesn't mean what it means ordinarily. A man is moral just like a jockey is very ascetic: in order to win the next race. In other words, it is merely for the end. So the theoretical life as the highest end makes intelligible that there are the moral virtues, but it does not make intelligible why they should be choiceworthy for their own sake. Now fortunately, *theōria*, contemplation, is not the only end of man. The other great end of man by nature is social life; and social life also needs the moral virtues. Take Hobbes: the virtues are conditions of peacefully living together. Again you can take almost any example, say, that of the habitual drunk, whose unpeaceable and noisy conduct toward his fellows makes it perfectly clear that some self-restraint is necessary. And the same is true of the other moral virtues.

If we view the virtues in the light of society as the end, we arrive at a very well-known doctrine, much-quoted and well-known, the utilitarian understanding of morality: virtue is required for living together. But here we see also in the utilitarian doctrine that the moral virtues are understood as means for something, not as choiceworthy for their own sake. Now we have this great difficulty: if morality or virtue is required only as a means for the common good, and [(if we do not want to argue circularly)] the common good is here<sup>12</sup> defined in [non-]moral terms—the common good then means something like peace, wealth, freedom—it is then at least possible that under certain circumstances, the moral vices may be conducive to that common good. Machiavelli's point. Now if so, it appears that the moral virtues cannot be understood as being for the sake of the common good, nor for the sake of the city.

These positions have a point, but they are not sufficient. The only way to proceed,<sup>13</sup> in order especially to avoid Machiavellianism, is to understand the city as being for the sake of the practice of moral virtue, and this is surely what Aristotle does. So in other words, the city is for the sake of moral virtue, but moral virtue is itself also for the sake of something higher: *theōria*, philosophy. But if we disregard the philosophers entirely, then we see that moral virtue is irreducible to any other end than itself, and that is what decent men ordinarily say, that decency is choiceworthy for its own sake.<sup>14</sup> To use colloquial terms now in use, moral virtue appears to us as empirically absolute. And that is represented, reproduced, in Aristotle's presentation of the *Ethics*. We can say, using a non-Aristotelian *theōria*, [that] moral virtue or its implications have

<sup>xviii</sup> See *ST* 1-2ae, q58 a5.

the character of an unwritten *nomos*, which is understood by gentlemen or tolerably decent men everywhere, in Greece or in China or wherever you look, and yet which is irreducible—not because it is strictly speaking absolute, as it is according to Kant in modern times, but because moral virtue is as it were situated at the point where the requirements of the two fundamental ends of man, theoretical life and society, meet. Not the ends themselves, but their requirements. And this is, one can say, the mystery of Aristotle's point of view. In fact, moral virtue derives its dignity from the fact that it points beyond the vulgar goals, toward man's highest end. Moral virtue is ultimately, from the philosopher's point of view, a reflection of philosophy. The gentleman, the *kalos k'agathos* in Greek, points toward the philosopher, but he is not a philosopher and he is lower than a philosopher, from Aristotle's point of view. And his pointing toward the philosopher is not, therefore, without ambiguity. To mention only one: the craftsman or artisan, who by definition is not a philosopher, is in one sense closer to the philosopher than the gentleman, [for] a very simple reason. A gentleman cannot be petty, he cannot count every penny—it is impossible. The craftsman, [however], has to be *exact*. Look at a carpenter, or a shoemaker: this kind of quality which the craftsman has and the gentleman despises shows a certain affinity,<sup>15</sup> a certain kinship between the craftsman and the philosopher. The picture is not of course as simple as it appears from a strictly political presentation of the issue. Now the clearest statement which we find of this whole state of affairs occurs at the end of the other *Ethics* of Aristotle, the so-called *Eudemian Ethics*, from a man called Eudemus, probably Aristotle's son. There, towards the end, we find a discussion of two kinds of goodness, a gentleman's goodness and a non-gentleman's goodness. I can only encourage you to read that with some care. I think the solution is as I have suggested. In the Loeb it is on pages 469 following.

Now with this I conclude my remarks about Aristotle on the basis of Aristotle's *Politics*. This political philosophy is ultimately unintelligible without an understanding of what the contemplative ideal, as it is called, means. One can say the highest theme of Aristotle's political science is philosophy as a way of life, and this was always so in classical times, in Plato as well as in Cicero, and one of the most striking differences between modern political philosophy and classical political philosophy is that philosophy as a way of life has disappeared from modern political philosophy. Of course, a political scientist or a social scientist today still speaks of philosophy, or has other names for it, as parts of culture which are of great interest to the social scientist, but that is not quite the same thing.

Is there any point you would like to bring up in connection with this question of the foundations? Or perhaps I will continue my exposition, and then we will have a free-for-all at the end of the meeting. The clever ones among you may wish to get some inkling of what will happen next time. Yes?

**Student:** A while ago you pointed to the danger of circularity in saying that on the one hand, virtue is the means to the city, and on the other, the end of the city is moral virtue. Now, did we really get around that by saying that while moral virtue is conducive to the ends of the city, the end of the city is the same thing? Don't we have to ask the original question: How does Aristotle know what moral virtue is, is for itself?



**LS:** Well, could one not assume, to take care of the circularity, the city is for the sake of moral virtue, and moral virtue finds its ultimate justification in the theoretical life?

**Student:** One would hope the justification would be in the theoretical life; but what about the other justification, that it is for itself?

**LS:** Well, but let us assume someone has no understanding, has no taste for the philosophic life. What would be the highest for him?

**Student:** The highest would be moral virtue, to be really good himself.

**LS:** Yes, that is the point which Kant makes, that moral virtue is the highest. We all can understand that, although it is not equally well understood by all people at all times. That is a peculiar heritage from the age of Enlightenment, that it seemed to be so clear that the only thing which we can rightfully expect from a man, and for which we can rightfully respect a man, is his honesty. And I think a liberal society at its best is based on this principle: not simply on freedom, but also on the fact that only probity and decency are to be respected.

Well, then, I will turn to the other great teacher of political philosophy—

[change of tape]

**LS:** —but as for questions regarding Aristotle's *Politics*, I remind you of what I said about the end of the Third Book, and other difficulties of that kind. But they are not comparable in magnitude to those you find in Plato.

In the nineteenth century an approach towards Plato emerged (and not only towards Plato) which still predominates, [and] which we can call the historical approach. "Historical" means here "genetic," and in a twofold way. First, we have to see Plato (and the same would of course be true of Aristotle) as in one way or another an outgrowth of Greek life, of Greek life and society and understanding, or of *Greekness*, you can say. And the second is we have to study Plato's thought in its own genesis, Plato's development. And there are certain views which we might find, I believe, in every book on Plato as far as I remember: there is an early period, there is a middle period, and there is a late period, and we know exactly what Plato thought, if not in every year, in each of these periods and how they developed from each other. I must say, in honor of a former professor of the University of Chicago, Paul Shorey, that he was the only one who opposed this view at the time when it was strongest. He wrote among other things a book called *The Unity of Plato's Thought*, in which he tried to show that Plato never changed his mind.<sup>xix</sup> I think I would agree with Shorey's thesis, only sometimes he makes things a bit easy for himself. In other words, he doesn't see that there are certain great difficulties that he cannot resolve. I do not believe that they can be solved by the way that the men who opposed Shorey thought to solve them, by thinking Plato only changed his mind, but the difficulties are there.

Now a special point of course is that among the dialogues that have come down to us as Platonic, quite a few are declared to be spurious, not written by Plato. As far as I can judge, this kind of

<sup>xix</sup> Paul Shorey, *The Unity of Plato's Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1904).

declaration in all cases is based on a kind of presumed knowledge of what Plato could have written—"this he could not have written"—or that they believe they have exhausted Plato's possibilities. There is one little dialogue called *Menexenus*, which is regarded as genuine, and is *only* protected by a quotation in Aristotle. Without that, these people would have declared the *Menexenus* to be spurious because it is of a certain levity which is wholly unbecoming to [these severe men, Plato or else Socrates]<sup>16</sup>.

Now the reason why this approach is so powerful is ultimately an insufficient reflection on the form of Plato's work, on the simple fact that Plato did not write treatises as Aristotle did, but dialogues. He also wrote letters, but apart from the fact that some people say the thirteen letters are spurious (at least most of them), letters are also not treatises, of course. There is one letter which is particularly famous, the Seventh Letter, the longest one, which contains a kind of autobiography of Plato, and is frequently used in interpretations of Plato's political philosophy. But let us forget about the letters, and let us speak only about the dialogues. Now what is the consequence of the fact that Plato wrote dialogues? Very simple: that we never hear Plato speaking. Plato could have made himself a character in the dialogues, it is true; but that he did not do.

Since Plato never speaks, we cannot find Plato's views in any utterances occurring in the dialogues. The dialogues are in this way like dramas. Now when, for example, in Goethe's *Faust*, Faust replaces the words at the beginning of the Gospel of St. John, "In the beginning was the word" by "In the beginning was the deed," we cannot say that was Goethe's view.<sup>xx</sup> What we see is Faust's view. And so strictly speaking we never know what Plato thinks. But the solution to this difficulty is very simple: every child knows that Plato has one spokesman, his revered master Socrates, and hence what Socrates says has Plato's imprimatur, as it were. I would raise the question: How do you know? That is a long question. But even granting<sup>17</sup> that Socrates is the spokesman of Plato, we are confronted by the fact that one of Socrates's characteristics is his irony. Now to have a spokesman who is ironical, that is almost as bad as to have no spokesman at all. Of course, we have to raise the question, what is irony? and we cannot take any modern, especially romantic, view of irony. Literally translated, it means dissimulation. But a dissimulation gradually comes to mean a dissimulation of a certain kind: noble dissimulation. If someone dissembles his defects, then he is not an ironical man; but if he dissembles his excellences, then he is an ironical man. And it is clear why someone could dissemble his excellences simply in order to spare the sensitivities of other men: that is a noble effort. More generally, irony is such dissimulation as is practiced in the interests of other men, of interlocutors, at least as much as in the interests of the speaker. One can say irony<sup>18</sup> in the Socratic sense means a kind of serpentine wisdom with the innocence of doves. If it were only serpentine, it wouldn't be noble, but this [is a] peculiar combination of simplicity and complexity.

The comparison of Socrates with Jesus which this remark implies is of course very old and very plausible at first glance. Very famous is the<sup>19</sup> [statement] of Erasmus of Rotterdam, *Sancte*

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<sup>xx</sup> *Faust*, II. 1224-1237.

*Socrate Ora Pro Nobis*, treating Socrates as a saint.<sup>xxi</sup> But the difference between Socrates and Jesus is more or less important. And I will read you now a true Christian saint, namely Sir Thomas More, the author of *Utopia*, which shows that he was a very good knower of Plato's *Republic*. But this work, called *Of Comfort against Tribulation*, he wrote in prison shortly before his execution. You know his fate. Here he says somewhere: "To prove that this life is no laughing time, but rather a time of weeping, we find that our Savior himself wept twice or thrice; but never find we that he laughed so much as once." And now the great laughter Thomas More adds: "I will not swear that he never did; but in the leastwise he left us no example of it. But on the other side, he left us example of weeping."<sup>xxii</sup> Exactly the opposite is true of Socrates. When you go over the writings of Plato or Xenophon, you will never find Socrates weeping. You find him, however, laughing twice or thrice, and this is an indication of a fundamental difference. We can say there is a slightly greater kinship of the Platonic dialogue with comedy than with tragedy. We cannot call it comedy, surely not, but there is a slightly greater kinship with comedy than with tragedy.

Irony means (to state it somewhat differently) to speak with a view to someone, speaking differently to different kinds of people. And all Socratic utterances are in this sense ironical. If we want to understand these utterances properly, we have to consider the people to whom he speaks, the time, the place, the moral and intellectual qualities of the people with Socrates. We always have to be able to translate, as it were, the statements made, say, toward Crito in the *Crito*, with what Socrates might say to Plato. We can say the understanding of a Platonic dialogue consists in transforming something in two dimensions—that is, a plane—into something which is three-dimensional, which requires an effort on our part to discover. We must consider not only what Socrates says, but how he says it: not his voice or intonation, but when he spoke, to whom he spoke, and under what circumstances. I mention another point only in passing, a very important difference: that some Platonic dialogues look like dramas. At the beginning you find the characters enumerated and then it begins. And there are also narrated dialogues, which have the form, "and then I asked him" and so forth. But here the great question arises: Why is the *Republic*, for example, a narrated dialogue, and the *Gorgias* a performed dialogue? These questions are as important for the understanding of a Platonic dialogue as the understanding of an actual discussion. I think all errors of interpretation are based on this crucial fact. You see, it is much more difficult to understand a Platonic dialogue, however simple and early it is, than Aristotle's *Politics*.

Now we find at the entrance of Plato's work—not literally, but with qualifications—the *Apology of Socrates* and the *Crito*. I will discuss this as an example. Some people say that in the *Apology* you see Socrates as a rebel who stands up for freedom of speech, or whatever it may be, whereas in the *Crito* we see Socrates the law-abiding citizen. And therefore we find, on the lower level of interpretation, two schools of thought: the revolutionaries, who like the *Apology*, and the conservatives, who prefer the *Crito*. Needless to say, this is an arbitrary selection: both things are Socrates. This tension, between Socrates the law-abiding citizen and Socrates the rebel, is Socrates. By understanding that tension, one has made considerable progress toward [the]

<sup>xxi</sup> "Sancte Socrate Ora Pro Nobis" was a marginal addition to the *Convivium Religiosum* (first printed in the July-August 1522 edition), *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), v. 39-40, 233.

<sup>xxii</sup> More, *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*, chap. 13.

understanding of Socrates. Socrates is neither simply the rebel nor simply law-abiding. It is perfectly clear from the *Apology* itself that he would not obey a law that is manifestly unjust. What about the law which condemns him to die? He obeys it. Is it a just law? Is he justly condemned? One of his younger friends, the most enthusiastic but not the most intelligent among them, is a young man called Apollodorus, and he told Socrates after he was condemned to death: "How terrible that you have been condemned to death, unjustly!" Whereupon Socrates said: "Would you like it better if I had been justly condemned?" This is one of the very rare occasions where it is explicitly said that Socrates laughed.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Now to speak more particularly about the *Crito*: Of this famous statement demanding absolute law-abidingness without any qualification, that is, with this qualification: that if you have the right to emigrate with your property and you have not availed yourself of that right, then you are obliged to obey the laws. By your staying there, you have made a kind of tacit contract to obey them. Now this leads to all kinds of interesting questions. Let us assume the only property you have is landed, which you cannot well take with you, or you may not be able to sell it, what are you to do then? In this dialogue, *Crito* is afraid of what people will say about *him* if his friend Socrates is executed. And this is particularly grave because he is a very wealthy man, and it was apparently a matter of course that by prudent application of bribes you could get a man out of jail in Athens. Now what Socrates actually does in the dialogue is to supply Crito with a defense of Crito . . . what Crito can say to the people who accuse him of not trying to help his old friend Socrates, who has been so helpful to him. In other words, what Socrates presents here fits Crito and his accusers, whether it would fit man on a higher level needs investigation. As for the *Apology of Socrates*, we have some direct clue in Plato's dialogue called *Gorgias*, where Socrates discusses his situation if he would be accused of a crime in Athens.<sup>xxiv</sup> He makes it clear that if he were accused he would be in the position of a physician accused by a pastry cook before a tribunal of children. These children would say: You have taken away our pastries, our pleasures, or our toys, for that matter. And how could he possibly explain to these children that the bitter pills which he gave them, the bitter truths, are better than these sweets? The Athenians would be wholly unable to understand him, and therefore he must adapt what he tells them to their capacity. And that is the way in which one would have to study the *Apology*.

Now a few words about the most famous political work of Plato, the *Republic*. I heard that in this country it is sold much more than any other work of Plato. Now the *Republic* is distinguished from the *Apology* and the *Crito* and even from the *Gorgias* by one very obvious fact, appearing to the simple reader: a radical, extreme critique of democracy as such. In the *Gorgias* he criticizes certain democratic statesmen—Themistocles, Pericles, and so on—but here democracy as such is radically criticized. The context of course is the presentation of the best regime, of the truly just regime, and democracy is viewed in the light of that. Now this truly just regime is characterized by three institutions: absolute communism, communism regarding property, women, and children; equality of the two sexes; and rule of philosophers. And the reasoning justifying these institutions takes up a relatively short space, chiefly in the Fifth Book. But there is a kind of hidden reasoning which starts at the very beginning. The question is raised: What is justice? And the first answer given is: justice consists in restoring property to its rightful owners. But there is an obvious difficulty here. Let us assume the property is a knife, and the owner is

<sup>xxiii</sup> This occurs not in Plato but in Xenophon's *Apology of Socrates* (sec. 28).

<sup>xxiv</sup> *Gorgias* 521e-522c.

insane. Obviously justice does not consist in restoring his property to him; then only if such restoration is good for the owner. We must of course enlarge it, because there are actions of justice which have nothing to do with restoring of property. And then we would say, as the Western tradition does, justice consists in giving or leaving to everybody what belongs to him. But here we have the same difficulty. In giving or leaving to a man what belongs to him, if the individual concerned is a vicious playboy, it would be much better for him to be deprived of what he owns than for him to keep it. In other words, there is a conflict between justice understood as giving or leaving to everyone what belongs to him, and the other equally reasonable proposition that justice is good.

This difficulty has been stated very well by Plato's fellow student of Socrates, not to say friend, in his *Education of Cyrus* . . . a story which I have retold, I believe, in almost every class I have given.<sup>xxv</sup> There was a big boy who had a small coat, and a small boy who had a big coat. And young Cyrus, future founder of the Persian Empire, was in a school of justice—because in Persia they have schools of justice, not of reading, writing, and arithmetic—and there he was asked: If the big boy took away the coat of the small boy and gave him the small coat, how would he judge the case? And he said: That is fine, now each one has what fits him. And then he was spanked: he was not requested to decide what is fitting, but what is right in the sense of legal. But if we are concerned with justice pure and simple, not with secondary considerations, we have to find an order in which everyone gets what is good for him, and that means of course the abolition of private property: the very simple fact that men who now are well served by having a big estate under their control may tomorrow be wholly unfit for it means that there cannot be private property. And who is to do the assigning? Only competent men who are able to say what is good for whom, a kind of physicians of the soul. And that is the reason why there must be absolute rule of philosophers and why they must have common property.

Now regarding the rule of the philosopher, we find this very extreme statement in the center of the *Republic* more or less: that all evils will cease from the cities if the philosophers are kings.<sup>xxvi</sup> In the immediate context this means the philosophers' becoming kings is a necessary and sufficient condition. Incidentally, in the Seventh Letter this is also repeated, and in the Seventh Letter there is not even an allusion made to communism and the equality of the sexes. But even in the *Republic* I think that is clearly indicated. If the philosophers' becoming kings is the necessary and sufficient condition for the cessation of all evils, then there is no need for absolute communism or equality of the sexes. What is the basis of the demand for equality of the sexes in the *Republic*? The reasoning supporting that equality is that the difference between the two sexes is not more relevant than the difference between bald-headed and not-bald-headed men. I believe this is a very insufficient statement about the difference between the two sexes. The only difference is said to be a difference of strength. Granting that for one moment, would this not be very important for the military profession? And women are supposed to be soldiers in the same way as men, to say nothing of the importance of the difference between the two sexes for war altogether: that the loss of many men is much less dangerous for the future of the city than the loss of many women, because a small number of men can generate a large number of children and the same is obviously not true of women.

<sup>xxv</sup> Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* I.3.17.

<sup>xxvi</sup> *Republic* 473d-e, Seventh Letter (326a-b).

But to go back to this general statement, that all evils will cease if the philosophers are kings. This wonderful order will come about if, when the philosophers become kings, everyone older than ten will be expelled from the city. So the rule of the philosophers is only a primary condition. Then they will expel everyone older than ten and start almost from scratch. The question of course arises: Who will do the expelling? These one or two philosophers—well, there are the soldiers around, but the soldiers have not yet been educated. In other words, the best regime as presented in the *Republic* is impossible. Why then does Plato create the appearance of presenting to us the best regime? Cicero has said somewhere that what Plato does in the *Republic* is not to present the best regime but, in Latin, the *ratio rerum civilium*, the nature of political things.<sup>xxvii</sup> By making this extreme experiment, this impossibility, Plato lets us see why it is impossible and therewith what are the limits, the character, the nature, of political things. One illustration: that is the famous noble lie, which Socrates demands be accepted by the city. The first half of it is that they all must believe that they have been brought up within the earth, in other words, that they all are simply children of the earth. And when speaking of them Socrates makes a slight change: he replaces the word “earth” with the word “land”—territory, this particular part of the earth. The noble lie suggests that each political society is natural, whereas what is natural is only the unity of the human race,<sup>20</sup>[as is] proven by the simple fact that generally speaking, a male human [being] from one society and a female human being from another can generate a human being. There is other evidence for this Platonic view (if it deserves [to] be called Platonic, because it is elementary) in other Platonic dialogues. This is the natural; this natural unity is not politically possible, however. And the political community must be ascribed a naturalness, a sacredness, which it cannot truly claim but which is necessary for its being a unity. The soldiers are to be like dogs, according to this. Dogs are, as we all know, nice to acquaintances and nasty to strangers. The famous fact [indicates] that here the polis, individual political society, is cut off from the other *political* societies, which are potential enemies, even if allies for the time being. And the joke here is quite obvious.<sup>21</sup> Socrates says here: Is this not the sign that the dog is a philosophic animal, because it distinguishes between good and bad people only on the basis of whether it knows them or not? Knowledge is its sole criterion: what a philosophic beast!

In a word, the polis as polis rests on opinion of questionable truth, and yet it is absolutely necessary. The polis is the cave. Leaving the cave is possible only for philosophers, i.e., a tiny minority of the human race. This is the *ratio rerum civilium*, the nature of political things, of which Cicero had spoken. And this of course is only an extremely brief summation of the subject matter of the *Republic*. I leave it at these remarks, and in a few minutes we can have discussion, if you like. Yes?

**Mr. Levy:** How can the naturally right regime be both the best regime and the floor? Either the floor can be improved on, one would think, or it is the best and every other regime is defective in some way. There is no floor, there is no minimum base, or everything must become a poor reflection of the best. That raises another question: how do we distinguish the absolutely barbarous from the moderately civilized?

**LS:** I beg your pardon? The last question.

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<sup>xxvii</sup> Cicero, *Republic* II, para. 52.

**Mr. Levy:** How do we distinguish the absolutely barbarous, such as we see in modern times, from the moderately civilized?

**LS:** I believe one would say this is a question of the flooring: the barbarous or simply tyrannical regimes are those that do not respect the very flooring of civil life. But the fact that a society respects the flooring, i.e., has a minimum of decency, does not make a perfect society of it. It can be very imperfect.<sup>22</sup> One can say that the various regimes which Aristotle discusses, with the exception of tyranny, are, as regimes, above the flooring; [they] accept the flooring. They do not practice cannibalism, they do not habitually<sup>23</sup> exterminate human beings, and so on.

**Mr. Levy:** In other words, the mark above which is civilization and below which is barbarism. The best civilizations are the highest.

**LS:** Yes, the highest would be one, although this is not feasible, in which philosophy is the highest and is recognized by the city. That is not possible, according to Plato, nor according to Aristotle. Therefore, the maximum you can have is a regime in which educated men, with a certain deference to philosophy, rule. An example was for them Pericles, educated in a way by Anaxagoras.<sup>xxviii</sup> There would be others. Yes?

**Student:** I'm still unclear about the relationship of philosophy to the polis. On the one hand, there seems to be a tension between them, and on the other, the end of the best regime, and the best life, would be the life of philosophy. On the one hand, public worship is the necessarily highest form of philosophy of which the city is capable, and on the other, since philosophy transcends the city, it is not essential to the city. Then when would philosophy and the city be in harmony with each other? Only in the best regime?

**LS:** That philosophy would be openly in control—well, theoretically, yes, only in the best regime as Plato described it. The question is whether that is feasible.

**Same Student:** I was referring to Aristotle.

**LS:** And then?

**Same student:** Well . . . when in the . . . when *would* philosophy be in harmony with the city? In Aristotle's scheme? And when would there be the tension between philosophy and the city? And what would be the cause of that tension?

**LS:** Well, you gave one very important example: there are the gods of the city. That is exactly the point. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle could not accept these gods and the stories regarding them. And the city, according to their view, necessarily makes such demands. And Plato has discussed it most clearly in the Tenth Book of the *Laws*. In the *Laws* there is officially no rule of philosophers, just a kind of very much improved Sparta. But then the question arises: Must the city not have gods? Of course. And here Plato experiments with a theology which is acceptable to philosophy, and to the extent to which there were such a theology acceptable to philosophers,

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<sup>xxviii</sup> Pericles is said to have learned something of the study of nature from the philosopher Anaxagoras in Plato's *Phaedrus* 270a.

there could be harmony.<sup>xxix</sup> In a way, what the Enlightenment tried to do<sup>24</sup>—a rational religion, a natural theology, as the sole demand which human society makes on everyone, including the philosophers—would be such a solution. Do you know something about these men of the Enlightenment? . . . No. In other words, my brief reply tells you something?

**Same student:** Yes. Well, I was referring specifically to *Aristotle*. And you had mentioned that in listing the various requirements of the polis, one of them was public worship, and you had said that philosophy could be considered the highest form of public worship because it deals with things divine. Now this would seem to contradict the statement that because philosophy transcends the city, it is therefore not essential to the city.

**LS:** This I do not see. The contradiction is this (which Aristotle expresses very clearly in the passages which I quoted): public worship is the fifth or first of the functions of the city. Now it would be the first, according to its intrinsic claim in the eyes of the city, but this claim is not as such recognized by Aristotle. There is a contradiction, but the contradiction is not one for which Aristotle or any other philosopher is responsible. The difficulty is this, that what Aristotle regards as the highest form of worship of the gods is not recognized as such by the city. Aristotle may call the ruling intelligence “Zeus,” condescending to what the people say, but this is of course not what they *mean*. And in the moment this becomes clear, then he will be in for trouble. Something like this happened to Socrates.<sup>25</sup> The clearest discussion of how to avoid the tension of which I am aware is the Tenth Book of the *Laws*, which is an amazingly liberal statement, contrary to the now-prevailing view that Plato was very nasty and tried to introduce a kind of Inquisition into Athens. What he did was infinitely more liberal than the practice of Athens. Plato wanted to rewrite, as it were, the Athenian law regarding impiety in such a way that Socrates could be tolerated by the city of Athens, which he could not be according to the purport of the law of impiety as understood by the majority of the citizens. Did I answer your question?

**Same student:** Yes.

**Student:** Why does Aristotle end the *Politics* with a discussion of education, and in particular, of musical education?

**LS:** Well, as you know, in the Eighth Book of the *Politics* there are quite a few references to things which “we will discuss,” and which we do not find discussed. Therefore, it seems likely that we do not have the end of the *Politics*, that it is lacking. God knows how many Books it originally had. But that he discusses music as such does not surprise you, I suppose. Or does it?

**Same student:** No, it doesn’t surprise me that he discusses it, but what surprised me was the indefiniteness with which—

**LS:** Yes, that is I believe due to mere accident, that the mice nibbled away a considerable part of the *Politics*. Something like this must have happened. For a number of years, many years, Aristotle’s writings were buried somewhere in a cellar in Asia Minor, for—I do not know how many—for quite a few decades, and then they were recovered. Aristotle had to run away from

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<sup>xxix</sup> Strauss later pointed out the ambiguities in the law the Athenian Stranger proposes in *The Argument and the Action of Plato’s “Laws”* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 155-56.



Athens, and whether this had anything to do with an accusation of impiety, or with this fact that he was connected with the Macedonian royal family, or with both, that we don't know. Aristotle is said to have said that he was fleeing from Athens lest Athens sin again against philosophy, i.e., as it had done before.

So. Well then, I wish you good luck.

[end of session]

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<sup>1</sup> Deleted "I remind you again of the fact that you will have to be here for being tortured on Wednesday, at the same time. I will try to do that as gently as possible. Now the other point is, it is too late to announce it in the normal way: I made a change in my arrangements for next quarter. I will not give the seminar on Kant, but I will give a lecture course on Plato's political philosophy, namely, an interpretation of one dialogue, the *Protagoras*."

<sup>2</sup> Deleted "his."

<sup>3</sup> Moved "'moral virtues.'"

<sup>4</sup> Deleted "does a right."

<sup>5</sup> Deleted "Now."

<sup>6</sup> Deleted "in order."

<sup>7</sup> Deleted "does he know, how."

<sup>8</sup> Deleted "good."

<sup>9</sup> Deleted "although."

<sup>10</sup> Deleted "if you."

<sup>11</sup> Deleted "what."

<sup>12</sup> Deleted "of course, if we do not want to argue circularly, not." Moved "if we do not want to argue circularly."

<sup>13</sup> Deleted "is to understand."

<sup>14</sup> Deleted "Moral virtue is."

<sup>15</sup> Deleted "of the craftsman."

<sup>16</sup> Changed from "this severe man Plato or either Socrates."

<sup>17</sup> Deleted "it."

<sup>18</sup> Deleted "means."

<sup>19</sup> Deleted "work."

<sup>20</sup> Deleted "and"

<sup>21</sup> Moved "that."

<sup>22</sup> Deleted "There are."

<sup>23</sup> Deleted "well."

<sup>24</sup> Deleted "in a way."

<sup>25</sup> Deleted "So the tension would be possible—I mean."